15 years of speaking up for British taxpayers
The story of the TaxPayers’ Alliance, 2004-19

Andrew Allum & Matthew Elliott
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by Andrew Allum and Matthew Elliott
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting out</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots campaigns</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusaders for transparency</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposing wasteful spending</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping policy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforming tax</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battles on all fronts</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independently minded</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our friends</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always evolving</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the authors</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I : research papers</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II : current staff and research fellows</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III : former staff</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV : advisory council</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V : photo captions</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

Fifteen years on from its founding, the TaxPayers’ Alliance is needed now more than ever. The British taxpayer is handing over a higher proportion of their hard-earned money to the government than at any time since Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson was in power. That was the late 1960s, a period of punishing taxes that inspired Ray Davies of The Kinks to open his song Sunny Afternoon with the line “The tax man’s taken all my dough”. The Beatles matched that with equally angry song lyrics saying, “I’m the taxman and you’re working for no one but me”.

In 2018-19, the government will raise £787 billion – equivalent to £29,000 per household. The bottom ten per cent of earners pay almost 50 per cent in taxes, once duties and VAT are wrapped in. Our national debt – the real debt, when you factor in state and public sector pensions – is rising close to £8 trillion. And this is after nine years of governments headed by Conservative prime ministers and chancellors.

With a Labour opposition hijacked by a hard-left, openly espousing Marxist objectives to re-nationalise industries, strengthen the unions and bring back punitive taxation, it looks like we might indeed be heading back to the ‘60s and ‘70s – but without the amazing music.

Despite the challenges we face, we’ve had some notable achievements over the past 15 years. We have helped create a climate in which increased transparency of how public money is spent is now expected from all branches of government. Our effective use of Freedom of Information requests has made this data more widely available. It is now commonplace
for journalists and politicians to discuss government policy in terms of “not wasting taxpayers’ money”. We helped shift that narrative.

Above all, we have devised a robust method of bringing about change. I started at the TPA over a decade ago as an intern, before staying on full time as a policy analyst. I then headed up our research team, and I am now our fourth Chief Executive. So I realise how important solid research is – facts must underpin any narrative. A good campaign will make sense in the head and appeal to the heart. That’s why solid research is Step 1 in our model of change. Once that’s done, Step 2 is strategic communications: taking those facts and presenting them to the media – traditional and new – in a way that gets coverage. Too many good ideas have been lost in the fog of bad communication.

Our success has been built on constantly simplifying complex ideas or mind-numbing numbers. Getting those messages out there leads to Step 3 – sustained campaigning. When the TPA first started out 15 years ago, that largely consisted of tried-and-trusted methods like action days or protests. Those methods are still a vital part of what we do, but over the years we’ve also been at the forefront of new methods of campaigning online. Taken together as a step-by-step process, this model of change has worked very well for us over the past 15 years, ensuring the TaxPayers’ Alliance punches well above its weight.

In the following pages, our founders Matthew Elliott and Andrew Allum describe our grassroots campaigning, our crusade for greater openness about public expenditure, and our challenge to government to cut waste and reform taxation. It has been a busy, relentless quest to stand up for
taxpayers and protect their hard-earned money. But first, they reveal what motivated them to kick it all off.

And I think it is important to offer them a vote of thanks here at the start of the book – thanks from me, personally, for giving me a chance a decade ago. But much more importantly, thanks for setting up an organisation that puts taxpayers first. It was long overdue, and it is still so valuable today.

John O’Connell
Chief Executive
The TaxPayers’ Alliance
Starting out

Success has many parents, they say, whereas failure is an orphan. This became clear when one of us had a meeting in 2013 at No 11 Downing Street with the then Chancellor, George Osborne. Matthew was there to tell him about the launch of a new campaign called Business for Britain, but it was clear the Chancellor was having a bit of a late afternoon slump, so he wasn’t quite as focussed as he might have been.

We discussed grassroots campaigns and the models established by the TaxPayers’ Alliance and the Countryside Alliance. “I was involved in the creation of both of those campaigns,” Osborne interjected rather grandly. There was a pause in the room. He then must have realised who was sitting opposite him. Quickly he followed up, saying, “Oh, of course I know you had a lot to do with it as well”. A little, yes! But we’d also heard that other leading Tories were claiming a similar role at various fundraising dinners. A compliment indeed, but, for the record, here is the true story of the TaxPayers’ Alliance.

The fear that government was moving in the wrong direction without any significant political opposition triggered us to come together in the autumn of 2002 to devise the TaxPayers’ Alliance. Having won a second election in 2001, Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Gordon Brown seemed unstoppable.

Tax and spend was going up, threatening our nation’s economic growth. Gordon Brown was determined to get 50 per cent of voters dependent on the state one way or another, whether it was middle class welfare or public sector professionals being mollified with generous pay increases that bought their loyalty.
Fiscal restraint was abandoned and New Labour splashed out billions of taxpayers’ money on capital projects, public sector wages and pensions. One of the most notorious examples of reckless expenditure during this period was the failed attempt to upgrade the NHS computer system. The overall cost of this was estimated at £9.8 billion, although the Public Accounts Committee investigation said it could rise even higher. Its report concluded it was one of the “worst and most expensive contracting fiascos” in public sector history.

But the media was in thrall to New Labour and the Conservatives were cowed by their opponent’s astonishing electoral success, seeking to match their spending spree rather than oppose it. Margaret Thatcher’s revolutionary desire for a smaller state with less taxation seemed distinctly uncool Britannia.

With a Conservative Party desperate to ape New Labour and abandon many of the concerns of its core supporters, there was clearly a hunger for groups that could help protestors stand up against an establishment indulging their own pet projects while throwing our money around to buy support.

As students we had been inspired by the free market economist Milton Freidman. He made it clear that you get best value for money when you are spending your own cash on buying something for yourself; you get less value for money when you’re buying for someone else; but if you are using someone else’s money to buy something for another person, that’s where you get the least value for money. Of course, that is what happens in the public sector. Lower taxation and smaller government was at the heart of his philosophy as well as that of Friedrich Hayek, another great inspiration for us. On that basis, we wanted to open up awareness of how
government was spending our money and how it might stop wasting some of it.

Our first meeting in late 2002 was over lunch in a restaurant off Marylebone High Street. We were joined by Florence Heath, who Andrew had met at Imperial College, and her brother Allister. We were impressed by campaigning organisations in the USA such as Americans for Tax Reform and the National Taxpayers Union, as well as similar groups in France and Germany. Citizens Against Government Waste had been especially effective at embarrassing the US Congress over “pork-barrel” projects intended to buy support from key voters by producing an annual *Pig Book*. David Williams, their then Research Director, was an early visitor and has been a firm friend of the TaxPayers’ Alliance for the past 15 years.

Some excellent research groups already existed in Westminster, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute. We knew that they published heavyweight research that influenced thinking, so we thought that a more grassroots campaign would be complementary to the good work already being done. We wanted to harness grassroots energy to pitch our messages in a simpler way to a far wider audience.
We had no money but a lot of enthusiasm. We carried on with regular early morning meetings at a coffee shop near Embankment station. Throughout 2003, while we constructed a website – a lot more complicated than it is now – we worked on our first major project, *The Bumper Book of Government Waste*. Ploughing through newspapers, we searched for any examples of bureaucratic waste, projects going over budget, and extravagant public expenditure. Our press cuttings books became the basis for our launch publication in February 2004.

We added up all the examples of government waste we could find to reach a total of £50 billion. To make that even more of a story, we divided that into a figure per family of £2,000. We sourced an image of an empty deck chair on a pristine beach and said that if government didn’t waste that sum of our money, every family in the UK could go on a holiday to the Caribbean. Alternatively, it could pay the average wages of two million nurses. It was our Eureka moment.

We didn’t have any contacts in the media but Allister Heath, then an aspiring journalist, now Editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, advised us to phone newspapers on a quieter Sunday morning when they’re understaffed and keen for a story. We bundled up some of our best anecdotes and Nic Cecil of *The Sun* immediately got the value of our message.

On Monday, 2 February 2004, *The Sun* gave us a big splash on page two with many of our examples boiled down into perfect tabloid titbits. “£2,000 of your tax wasted every year,” said the headline, “New campaign group’s bombshell”. Beneath that was a photograph of a grimacing Gordon Brown with a headline saying “How £50bn goes down the drain”. We even had the bonus of a *News in Briefs* model on
page three expressing her shock at government wasting this much money every year. Our story was also taken up by the Daily Express, Daily Mail, and Daily Telegraph. Our first radio interview followed.

A Sunday Times lead comment later that month warned Chancellor Gordon Brown not to wantonly raise taxes in his next budget and quoted us: “There is also what the newly formed TaxPayers’ Alliance describes as a ‘draconian and worrying’ retrospective element to his tax-raising frenzy”.

We had our first hit and in exactly the way that we had wanted it. As huge fans of Hayek, we noted that in his day he had said it was intellectuals that influenced society, but in a 21st century culture of celebrity and soundbites you need to have a broader, more popular touch. We were keen for our
research to be as at home in *The Sun* as in the *Sunday Times*. That initial publicity for our *Bumper Book of Government Waste* buoyed us tremendously. Bill Jamieson, then Executive Editor of *The Scotsman*, appreciated our news focused attitude. “Just to say how much I appreciate the news flow from the TaxPayers’ Alliance,” he said in an email to us in March 2004. “To reassure you it is not going into a black hole here, I gave most of my op ed piece in *The Scotsman* today to examples of waste/mismanagement”.

In June 2004, we had our first letter published in a national newspaper about the cost of big government. The next month we were quoted on the front page of the *Sunday Times* in their scoop on tax dodging at a football club. TV would take a little longer to penetrate but former staffers Blair Gibbs, James Frayne, Mark Wallace and Susie Squire all made impressive early debuts on screen. It was a great triumph when our former Campaign Director Emma Boon later represented the TaxPayers’ Alliance on the BBC’s flagship political show *Question Time*.

The second edition of our *Bumper Book of Government Waste* – co-authored by Matthew and Lee Rotherham and published by Harriman House – won the Atlas Sir Antony Fisher Memorial Award in 2006. This was especially gratifying as Sir Antony had founded the Institute of Economic Affairs, the think tank that helped shape the philosophy behind Thatcher’s revolutionary free market government of the 1980s.
Having made a big impact with our first reports, we faced the challenge of becoming a physical presence in Westminster with staff and an office. We’d all been volunteers while working on the first edition of the *Bumper Book of Government Waste* and sent out a wave of mailings to potential supporters to raise money to cover basic overheads like rent and wages.

“Britain is an aberration in not having a grassroots campaign for lower taxes,” we wrote in our Strategy Plan of October 2003, citing other organisations in the USA, Germany and France. “Recent tax increases and a growing despondency at excessive taxation means that Britain is desperate for a similar grassroots campaign”.

The pitch appealed to a number of like-minded people and the money we received enabled us to take the next step. Matthew, at the age of 25, quit his job in Parliament to go full time with the TaxPayers’ Alliance when we had raised enough money to cover his salary for the first three months. Others soon joined our team.

We set up our first office in Wilton Road in Victoria. James Frayne and Blair Gibbs came to work for us in those early days, along with Corin Taylor.

We then rented offices at 43 Old Queen Street, opposite the home of *The Spectator* magazine, before moving into our current headquarters at 55 Tufton Street in 2010. We had a team, a home, and it was time to start taking our message across the UK.
Grassroots campaigns

In 2006 the influential grassroots website, ConservativeHome, gave the TaxPayers’ Alliance their “One to Watch” Award. In 2008, we were named “Pressure Group of the Year” by readers of Iain Dale’s Diary. It was great to be making waves among fellow travellers and gaining their respect, but we were acutely aware that part of our remit was to break out of the Westminster bubble and connect with grassroots supporters around the country.

As well as our traditional grassroots activity, we put a lot of time and energy into coming up with the most eye-catching ways to reach people on the ground.

To alert the public to the enormous national debt racked up by the UK government, we devised an eye-catching lorry-mounted 23-foot-long digital Debt Clock. Every second it ticked up another £5,000, some £446 million a day. In 2010, it travelled 1,300 miles around the UK and by the end of that two weeks, over £6 billion more had been clocked up
on the national debt. Gaining much local coverage as well as national press, it reached parts of the country that an academic Westminster research report would not.

Exposing the impact of tax on everyday costs has been at the heart of many of our most memorable grassroots campaigns. We drew attention to the 60 per cent tax you pay when you fill up your car by producing a simple graphic printed on a display card, which stood on the counters of over 5,000 independent petrol stations. Our call to Freeze Fuel Tax was backed by *The Sun* and in 2013 the Chancellor announced a freeze on fuel duty.

One of the most enjoyable campaigns was the award-winning Mash Beer Tax campaign in 2013. With duty on a pint of beer rising by 42 per cent since 2008, the pub industry was seeing a decline in business with the government only gaining an extra 12 per cent in revenue. We revealed that British drinkers
paid the second highest tax on beer in the EU – ten times the rate of beer-loving Germany.

Our media partner The Sun gave us a lot of publicity, but we took the battle directly to the consumer by printing 400,000 beer mats, which were distributed to pubs and breweries around the UK, giving them the brief facts of our campaign. Again we reduced fiscal complexity to one simple arresting figure – one third of your pint is tax. The mat also displayed a link that allowed drinkers to use their mobile phones to send a letter of protest to their local MP. It couldn’t be easier – a pint in one hand and the means to take action in the other.

The Mash Beer Tax campaign was a perfect opportunity for us to meet many of our growing band of supporters across the nation. Andrew Allison was our National Grassroots Co-ordinator at the time and had a modest budget to buy supporters a pint as they helped distribute beer mats to their favourite locals and get their mates on board. It was especially
popular with students. This grassroots pressure eventually bore fruit in the 2013 Budget, when the Chancellor abolished the beer duty escalator that automatically added tax to a pint, plus introducing the first cut in beer duty since the 1950s. Further cuts in beer duty have since followed.

A regional offshoot in our battle against booze taxes was developed by our South West Coordinator, Tim Newark. He led a campaign to scrap the duty escalator on cider, amounting to almost a quarter of the price of a pint. He won the support of a number of MPs in the South West of England, who appreciated the importance of cider-making to their local communities. Backed by family and friends, Tim visited numerous county fairs and cider festivals, raising a petition of two thousand signatures from cider drinkers and makers. Sampling a variety of ciders as he did so, he told us it was an onerous task but someone had to do it! Personally handing the petition into the Chancellor of the Exchequer in London, his reward was a freeze in cider duty in the 2014 budget and then a cut in cider duty by two per cent the following year.

We have always been keen to support micro-campaigns of importance to local residents. In Bristol in 2012, local businesses were up in arms over council plans
to tax their employees’ parking spaces at £1 a day. Bristol City Council wanted to squeeze £4 million out of local workers, but opponents of this ‘Workplace Parking Levy’ said it was yet another burden on struggling city centre businesses. Local MPs and politicians weighed in, with Bristol mayoral candidate, Geoff Gollop, saying, “It is a disincentive to employment and a further tax on employers and employees at a time when we need to be creating jobs”. If they could get away with that, they might even be tempted to charge homeowners for parking on their own drive.

The TaxPayers’ Alliance added its voice to the protest and organised a well-attended demonstration in the city centre, and released statements to the local press. Within the month, local officials thought again and decided to dump their Workplace Parking Levy. We returned to the city for a celebratory photo op on the green outside the Bristol City Council offices. Our quick, effective intervention had helped secure a local victory for common sense. It was just one of many eye-catching local triumphs.

In Islington, London, a neighbourhood group of supporters drew attention to their council spending £100,000 on a 30-foot wall covered in plants. Unsurprisingly, the council hadn’t tested the watering system and it ended up as a very expensive dried out patch of scrub. “Islington’s Living Wall is Dead” said a full page article in the London Evening Standard and it made the front page of the Islington Tribune newspaper as well as being picked up by the Daily Mail and BBC news. It’s an office policy to always frame a front page newspaper story featuring the TaxPayers’ Alliance and this excellent grassroots effort made our gallery. Local hits like this are as important to us as nationwide projects.
In late 2018, we scored another important local victory, this time on the south coast in Southampton. The council had proposed establishing a Clean Air Zone in the city. The basic premise was commendable – air pollution is bad for all our health. But we knew there was established government guidance stating very clearly that charges are not required, and other action could be taken to reduce air pollution. So when Southampton Council proposed charging £100 for certain vehicles to enter parts of the city, we felt that motorists were being used as cash cows. In response, our activists travelled to Southampton to campaign against the charge and support the fight-back from local MP, Royston Smith. Our staff and volunteers turned up to Southampton FC on match day, in full kit, to warn supporters of the unwelcome new costs the tax would bring to fan coaches coming into the city. The council was forced to listen and dropped the charges, instead going ahead with other measures to reduce air pollution that won’t hit taxpayers in the pocket.
Crusaders for transparency

Transparency is a key part of our mission. We believe that, the more we know about how it is spent, the better taxpayers’ money will be managed. Government was too secretive. We pioneered the mass use of Freedom of Information requests to gather data from across the country, from government departments to individual councils, to find out exactly how they spend our money. The Freedom of Information Act of 2000 had established the principle of a public right of access to information held by public authorities and we grasped the value of lifting that veil of secrecy usually covering government business.

True, it is not the most glamorous work. But it is the painstaking reaping of data and analysing it that allows us to turn it into striking, focused figures that engage journalists and the public. In 2008 alone we sent out 2,313 FoI requests.

In 2006, our very first Public Sector Rich List highlighted 170 of the most highly paid people in the public sector, earning above £150,000 a year in government departments, quangos, other public bodies and public corporations. Three of them took home over £1 million a year, while a further 14 were earning above £500,000 a year.

In the following year we grew even more ambitious with our first Town Hall Rich List, the result of analysing a dizzying amount of expenditure from 230 local authorities. It generated eye-popping headlines for many newspapers, especially when we revealed that it was often the poorest areas, where residents struggled to pay their council tax, which employed the highest number of staff earning above £100,000.
Our research for 2007 showed that the council with the highest number of people earning over £100,000 – some 27 of them – was Tower Hamlets, one of the most deprived boroughs in the country. Similarly, the Chief Executive of Merthyr Tydfil council in South Wales, with high unemployment and close to the largest proportion of people on incapacity benefit in the UK, enjoyed a generous pay deal of £127,658. Breaking these statistics down region by region ensured we had wall-to-wall media coverage, too.

Our crusade for transparency was bolstered when the MPs’ expenses scandal broke in 2009. Their profligacy at our expense was widely condemned and we launched a campaign in partnership with the *Daily Mail* to “Bring them to justice”.

Our strong opposition to politicians’ greed was a double-edged sword. It may well have lost us some friends in parliament, just when we were looking to forge closer links
with the machinery of government. But our stance was at the very heart of our purpose, in rooting out waste, and it helped sharpen a hunger for more knowledge about government expenditure in general.

In July 2011, it was especially gratifying for us to be mentioned in the Government White Paper on Open Services. “We will ensure that,” said Section 5.25, “at both the national and local levels, commissioning decisions and the performance of providers are transparent and open to public scrutiny. Commissioners can be held to account for their decision by users (whose rights of redress we are strengthening) by independent audit and inspection bodies (for example, the National Audit office) and by independent champions (such as the TaxPayers’ Alliance”).

Nice words, but while the private sector was seeing wages fall or stagnate in the wake of the global financial crisis, the public sector was slower to respond. Our annual Public Sector Rich List continued to shock readers. If anything it seemed to reach a peak of generosity with taxpayers’ money. In 2015, it was inner city Haringey Borough Council that topped our Town Hall Rich List with 68 employees earning over £100,000, while the Chief Executive of Cumbria County Council received the biggest individual remuneration package of £411,025. Overall there were at least 3,483 council employees being paid over £100,000. Thanks to us drawing attention to this cost, the number of employees on over £100,000 in our 2018 report had fallen by almost a third to 2,306.

Labour MP Andy Slaughter was grateful for our research exposing sky-high senior executive pay in local government. “I commend the work of the TaxPayers’ Alliance in publishing the Town Hall Rich List,” he told his parliamentary colleagues.
“That list of shame, which is regularly updated and published is a great public service”. Prime Minister David Cameron concurred: “Every council should be transparent about how it spends council taxpayer’s money”.

In an age of so-called austerity, this public sector extravagance seemed even more like that of an *ancien regime* out of touch with reality. In recognition of the poor message this sent out to the wider society – and in response to our work – the Enterprise Act of 2016 introduced the power to end six figure pay-offs for people leaving the public sector, introducing a new cap of £95,000. It was particularly galling
to see these well-paid managers pocket such huge sums and then walk straight into another generously rewarded local government job. So we have made progress, but more could be done.

Thanks to our constant pressure on this front, councils must now publish all spending over £500 as well as publish in detail the pay and perks of senior staff. “The TaxPayers’ Alliance is to public spending what Dyno-Rod is to the public drains,” said Trevor Kavanagh of The Sun. “It probes the spent and occasionally corrupt waste of elected and unelected government officials. Its great service is to dig out the most shocking nuggets and, to the enormous gratitude of journalists, delivers them pristine and polished on a plate”. We might have chosen a more attractive metaphor but it certainly gets to the heart of what we are about!
Exposing wasteful spending

There could be no greater challenge to the status quo than the financial crisis of 2008. Over ten years later, its message of reckless expenditure threatening to undermine our society is still shaping politics. The subsequent loss of faith in the establishment to run our affairs sensibly has encouraged the rise of populist parties in many countries. At the TaxPayers’ Alliance, we understood early on that this was not just rooted in a series of errors in the banking sector, but also due to widespread concerns about public expenditure, too.

In 2009, we joined forces with the Institute of Directors to produce a report called *How to save £50 billion*. It detailed 32 practical steps that could save the UK government £42.5 billion a year from 2010-11 and a further two steps saving £7.5 billion in the following year.

“The UK is in the middle of a government debt crisis and our report sets out tangible proposals to cut the deficit,” said Miles Templeman, then Director General of the Institute of Directors. “Businesses are right now making savings and cutting back on costs to get through the recession, and there is no reason why the public sector should not have to do the same”. Any cut in spending has the potential for some pain, but our list showed that large sums could be saved without hurting vital services.
This report became the basis for a book published on the eve of the 2010 general election, cheekily entitled *How to Cut Public Spending (and still win an election)*. In addition to our original research, it brought together a number of reports from other countries showing how they had managed to make fiscal adjustments in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008.

It was perfect timing. The Blair/Brown spending spree had peaked after a decade of loose purse strings and a new government would have a golden opportunity to understandably prune back. In 2009, a YouGov poll had found that 52 per cent of the public thought that the deficit should be cut mainly by reducing public spending, not raising taxes, whereas just 30 per cent preferred tax increases.

Public spending had to catch up with the new reality. Whereas the financial crisis had been caused by irresponsible lending by bankers, a new fiscal crisis could be triggered by excessive borrowing by politicians. In 2010, the government was spending more than £5 for every £4 it raised in taxes. The deficit wasn’t just a passing phase due to recession, but a structural deficit which could only be dealt with by hiking taxes or cutting spending.

In our report we produced a step-by-step programme for government cuts, identifying some £50 billion of potential savings, from poorly performing government projects to
restraining public pay and perks; from reducing the number of government agencies to cutting middle class welfare. We published our complete list with the exact amount to be saved, as well as when and where – it couldn’t be more straightforward.

A veteran civil service insider, Sir Richard Packer, suggested how it could be carried out by a government bureaucracy that is not necessarily disposed to reining in spending. “They will accept that some cherished programmes will be cut or even closed,’” said Sir Peter, “so long as this occurs as part of a credible, thoughtful and determined attempt to put the country back on its financial feet”. They might even be willing to accept a pay freeze for senior civil servants and some reduction in future pension benefits – though he wasn’t betting on this being accepted by their union representatives.

A coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats emerged out of the 2010 election and we
continued to emphasise the need for a reality check on government expenditure. In 2011, we organised a Rally Against Debt outside the Houses of Parliament. Hundreds of people gathered to voice their concerns over the size of the debt mountain. In the two hours the rally was on, we calculated the debt increased by nearly £30 million – a rate of over £1m every five minutes. If ever there was a perfect time for the newly formed government to make the hard decisions of cutting back on spending, it was then. The public was ready for the necessary balancing of the books.

Scandinavian countries had taken the plunge after an earlier crisis and slashed their public spending, emerging as leaner, more efficient governments able to afford their generous social care. “A budget consolidation does not need to affect the social model decided on by the voters in a given country,” said the Swedish former State Secretary Jens Henriksson in our How to Cut Public Spending book. “A budget consolidation can even make a country stronger, both in the short and in the long term”.

But the much-vaunted austerity of Chancellor George Osborne did little to address the fundamentally bloated machinery of government in that first term. Our research in 2010 showed that the quangocracy of over 1,100 unelected bodies sucked up more than £90 billion of taxpayers’ cash, but the promised “bonfire of the quangos” barely happened. Many of their functions were simply shifted into other organisations and the government payroll continued to expand. In 2018, we reported that there were still hundreds of public bodies costing taxpayers’ over £200 billion. Less a bonfire, more of a “clammy Sunday afternoon barbecue”. said one Labour MP.
So, in 2015, we decided to map out once again exactly what spending decisions we thought could be made. It was in the run up to the general election, so our work was intended to offer a menu for all politicians to choose from in the continuing fight to live within our means. Having released *The Single Income Tax* in 2012 (more on that later), *The Spending Plan* was launched as a second flagship report. In it, we set out two courses of action: one to meet coalition spending forecasts of 35.2 per cent of GDP by 2020; and another with more savings to deliver the spending levels required to implement *The Single Income Tax* proposals of 2012, which were 33 per cent of GDP.

As we see it, spending £1 for £3 generated in the wider economy is more than enough to defend the country, keep law and order, deliver first class public services and protect the most vulnerable in society.

Looking back on our lists of precise budget cuts, we see that some of them were taken on board. There was a two-year pay freeze across the public sector and the government did shift the funding of free TV licences for the elderly to the BBC — though they are still squealing about that. We advised they reduce the benefit cap from £26,000 to £20,000 and the government accepted that benefits should not pay more than the average wage.

Streamlining government has always been a key priority in our spending campaign.
The Department for Energy and Climate Change and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills were both scrapped and some of their functions merged into other departments, a process that has seen other savings achieved through bureaucratic amalgamation.

Operating subsidies to Transport for London were cut thanks to us pointing out the unfairness of taxpayers funding packed trains and buses across the capital. If TfL couldn’t break even when its services are straining at capacity, then something must be wrong with its management.

For years, the list of patients registered at GP surgeries included millions of “ghost patients”. GP surgeries received annual payments for them, which meant they were getting more funding than they were entitled to. We drew attention to this and it was reformed by government.
Shaping policy

It is important to get our message out there as widely as we can, but we have also worked hard to get practical results from our campaigning and that means helping to shape future government policy. One of our earliest attempts at this was tackling Inheritance Tax. Regularly quoted as the least popular tax in the UK, we joined with the Daily Express in 2006 to raise a 200,000 signature petition calling for its abolition, which we then presented to the Treasury. The following year at the Conservative Party Autumn Conference, Shadow Chancellor George Osborne made a speech that rocked the political landscape.

“When Inheritance Tax was first introduced it was designed to hit the very rich,” Osborne told his audience. “But the very rich hire expensive advisers to make sure they don’t pay it. Instead, thanks to Gordon Brown, this unfair tax falls increasingly on the aspirations of ordinary people”. With house prices surging ever upwards this has only increased in recent years with more and more hard-working people expected to pay the tax.

“People who have already paid taxes once on their income,” said Osborne, “people whose only crime in the eyes of the taxman is that instead of spending their
savings on themselves, they want to pass something on to their families”.

As party members rose to their feet to applaud this rally cry to Middle England, Osborne pledged to raise the Inheritance Tax threshold to £1 million. At one stroke, the Tories were back on the path to power. Their poll ratings soared – and Labour PM Gordon Brown cancelled his plans for a snap election. It clearly demonstrated the political power of a bold low tax agenda.

Part of the way into our development, and with the expenses scandal behind us, we realised we had to engage more directly with MPs of all parties to make further progress. We invited political journalist Jonathan Isaby to join us in 2011 as our first Political Director. With his immense knowledge of Westminster personalities, we could directly present our cases to them.

“If you look at my school yearbook for 1996, it does say my ambition was to become a Member of Parliament,” recalls
Jonathan. “But I’ve assessed in my jobs in journalism and at the TPA that I can have influence on the political agenda, on public opinion and the policies that politicians take on board without the demands from the Whip’s office that you have to vote a certain way every night of the week unless you want to be frozen out from the hierarchy”.

Jonathan got busy and our researchers have testified before many all-party parliamentary Select Committees, giving advice and suggestions for tax reform. “The TaxPayers’ Alliance runs one of the most modern and effective campaigns in the country,” said Chris Heaton-Harris MP serving on the Public Accounts Committee. “Like many of my colleagues in Westminster, I’m always delighted to receive reports and briefings from the TPA because it is vital that we in Parliament are constantly reminded of the need to protect taxpayers’ interests”. James Roberts has now taken over this role with equal vigour, while Jonathan served as our Chief Executive from 2014 to 2016.
Reforming tax

As we’ve explained to many parliamentarians and committees over the years, not only are we taxed too much in this country, but the tax system is overly complicated. We are notorious for having one of the world’s longest tax codes, which has more than doubled in recent years. Simplifying it would save taxpayers a fortune, while also eradicating a raft of loopholes and oddities. For example, why are we taxing low income earners only to hand back tax credits to them?

Our biggest endeavour on this front was the 2020 Tax Commission. Working once again with the Institute of Directors, we began research on this in 2011, gathering information and views from leading tax experts, academics and business leaders. Allister Heath was Chairman, David B. Smith our chief economist, and Matt Sinclair the principal editor, helped by our leading researchers Rory Meakin and John O’Connell.
The Single Income Tax report was published in 2012 and proposed the abolition of eight taxes to be replaced by one income tax. As a result, families would enjoy substantial tax cuts while also boosting the economy. Boldly, we recommended that income tax and national insurance be merged, with the personal allowance rising to £10,000 and then a 30 per cent tax levied on all income above that. We also called for stamp duty, inheritance tax and air passenger duty to be abolished. And corporation and capital gains tax should be replaced with a single tax on capital income, including dividends, interest and rent, at a rate of 30 per cent.

“It is time for Britain to make a vital choice between tweaking the status quo and letting our economy continue to be crippled by complex and punitive taxes,” said Chairman Allister Heath, “and drastically changing course with a radical but realistic plan for a tax system fit for the 21st Century”. Graeme Leach, Director of Policy at the Institute of Directors, said “This is a radical and practical plan for reforming our tax system to make it fairer and better for the economy. Fiddling with the system causes more complexity and has little benefit to growth – this proposal would put a rocket under economic confidence”.

The published report was well received, generating much discussion in the press. Fraser Nelson, Editor of The Spectator, described it as “the most comprehensive guide to supply-side
economic reform published in Britain in a generation”. Mary Dejevksy argued in the Independent that even the political left should consider the value of a flat tax. “Radically simplify the tax system,” she wrote, “and no government would need anything like the 26,000 staff currently employed at HMRC on compliance... The wage bill, the buildings bill and the expenses bills could all be slashed – leaving every single taxpayer better off. So why is there no serious constituency for reforming the system along the lines of the fabled flat tax?”

Dejevsky bemoaned the fact that such common sense seemed to be the preserve of the libertarian right. “So long as the political left regards a big state as inherently better than a small state,” she said, “regardless of how well it does the job, it will dismiss a flat tax out of hand”. And yet a simplified, lower tax would benefit the less well-off and incentivise the richer to pay more and not avoid their taxes. Embracing a low 30 per cent maximum tax could be a vote winner for Labour, then led by Ed Miliband, making his party more attractive to the “squeezed middle”. “The 2020 Commission’s report runs to 400-plus pages,” she concluded, “Mr Miliband and his new policy chief should get reading”.

It is interesting to note that it was the centre-left Liberal Democrats that embraced one of our major recommendations of substantially raising the personal allowance – the amount of money you can earn before paying tax – and this was taken up by the Conservatives while in coalition with them. Indeed the rate has even exceeded what we proposed for it, rising in a recent budget to £12,500 by 2019.

The Centre for Economic and Business Research modelled our contention that reducing overall tax to 33 per cent of the national income would kick-start the economy
and stimulate higher growth. They not only revealed that all households would benefit greatly from tax cuts, but that the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be almost 10 per cent higher by 2030, while business investment would be 60 per cent higher. The budget deficit would also be wiped out more quickly. It was a win-win proposal.

Having set the agenda for tax reform, we set about selling it to the government with a series of meetings with MPs, Peers and Ministers on a one-to-one basis. At Prime Minister’s Questions on 27 June 2012, David Cameron declared “I certainly support flatter, fairer taxes”.

It is a tremendous pity that political uncertainty in recent years appears to have undermined the government’s confidence in following our bold suggestions. In an age of populism, a profound reform of taxation with the poor seen to gain as much as the rich could well win many votes and dent the progress of a resurgent Marxist left. In the US, President Donald Trump’s dramatic tax cuts have triggered higher growth and more jobs to the great satisfaction of many Americans.

In 2013, we focused on the issue of stamp duty as a stand-alone campaign. We took our ‘Stamp Out Stamp Duty’ message around the country, calling on supporters to send letters to their local MPs. “Stamp duty is a punitive tax that is long overdue an intelligent re-think,” said one campaigner in Salisbury. “Having increased 15-fold since 1992, it is essentially an outdated piece of pocket-picking that needs urgent overhaul!”

A part of our campaign was successful in that we had long argued that the ‘slab’ rate structure was economically damaging. This meant that a £1 difference in the cost of a house could lead to a huge tax increase. Unsurprisingly, this
caused all sorts of perverse incentives, so we were pleased when the structure was smoothed by Chancellor George Osborne. However, he also had other things in mind. Massive hikes in stamp duty, particularly at the top end of the market, have caused untold economic damage and brought in less revenue than the previous system. So we continue to fight for big cuts to stamp duty.

It is thought that George Osborne hiked stamp duty at the top end of the market in order to see off a mansion tax, which was a policy that Labour pursued under Ed Miliband’s watch. That would have levied an annual charge on high value homes. But of course not everyone who lives in a high value home has an income high enough to pay such a charge. They may have bought the property decades ago, not predicting that their area would become fashionable many years hence. What’s more, residents already pay council tax on their homes. So we naturally launched a vocal campaign against it, and were pleased to see it dropped, although we weren’t so pleased with the trade-off of sky-high stamp duty!
In 2013, we received the Templeton Freedom Award from the Atlas Network for our *Single Income Tax* report as part of the 2020 Tax Commission. We had won two previous Templeton Freedom Awards but, as this was the tenth year the Atlas Network had administered the awards, the prize was accompanied by a cheque for $100,000. Matthew and Matt Sinclair flew to New York to accept the award at their Freedom Dinner. It was glorious to be surrounded by so many American and international friends who had seen us grow and develop over the previous decade.

Announcing our award, Atlas CEO Brad Lips said, “The TaxPayers’ Alliance has become such a force of nature in a relatively short amount of time. From impeccable research to clear messaging, they’ve really raised the bar for think tanks”. We had started this thing from nothing and done something unusual. We had not just been content with a membership based taxpayers’ group, but had given the taxpayer a clear and ever-present voice in the media.

Some of the attributes we pioneered were quite uncommon for the free market community at that time. From constantly being available for journalists with a media mobile through to hard-hitting short research papers – and doing lots of them rather than writing longer, more infrequent papers which journalists couldn’t get their heads round. All in all, we’ve produced 327 publications over 15 years. After the Atlas Awards, we headed for Times Square to continue our celebrations. It was a magical moment.
Battles on all fronts

We scored another direct hit with our reports on the taxpayer funding of trade unions, exposing that they received at least £108 million in subsidies from taxpayers in 2012-13. An estimated £85 million of this was paid in facility time – time off for public sector employees to work on trade union matters. Our research also demonstrated that public bodies often deducted trade union subscriptions in the payroll without charging unions for additional administrative support.

The individual cost of public sector trade union leaders was underlined with our Trade Union Rich List reports. The most recent report showed that 31 of them took home pay packets worth £100,000 or more in 2017. In a reply to a question in the House of Commons on our research, Prime Minister David Cameron goaded Labour MPs by saying, “They’ll always listen to the trade unions, but they’ll never listen to the TaxPayers’ Alliance”.

38
Francis Maude initiated a government review into the taxpayer funding of trade unions, explaining, “there is something euphemistically called facility time,” adding “we will more than halve the cost of facility time to the taxpayer”. Sir Eric Pickles MP, then Communities and Local Government Secretary, said that, “Trade union activities and campaigning in local councils should be funded by members’ subscriptions, not bankrolled by the taxpayer”.

Determined to update trade union law, the 2016 Trade Union Bill made a special mention of our work. In an impact assessment paper, dated January 2016, it noted, “The cost of facility time in the public sector is paid for out of public funds... There was inadequate monitoring and control of this spending in the Civil Service and evidence (including research carried out by the TaxPayers’ Alliance) suggests this remains the case in the wider public sector. These measures will extend this publishing requirement to the wider public sector, in the interests of transparency and accountability”.

Furthermore it confirmed, “This measure in the Bill is to help ensure taxpayers’ money is only spent on appropriate and accountable trade union work that represents value for money to the taxpayer”. Trades Union Congress General Secretary Frances O’Grady was furious, saying, “This Bill is an unnecessary attack on workers’ rights and civil liberties that will shift the balance of power in the workplace”.

The Trade Union Act passed into law later that year. Despite this major reform, our research continues to show that local authorities still provide millions of pounds worth of facility time to unions. Another key provision, however, was that industrial action can only take place when there has been a ballot turnout of at least 50 per cent. Too much power in
The hands of a few militant trade unionists had nearly crippled the British economy in the 1970s and recent legislation has sought to balance this more appropriately.

The number of campaigns we have run in 15 years is nothing short of extraordinary. Several others were particularly powerful and had notable impact. Our campaign on empty property rates prompted a surge in interest from a lot of supporters. Labour Chancellor Gordon Brown had decided that businesses had to pay full business rates on an empty commercial property just three months after it became vacant. That was too short a window for many businesses to either sell the property or find new tenants, and in many cases it led to a much more destructive decision – tearing down the property.

Some of our supporters had commercial properties as their retirement nest eggs, as they didn’t have the luxury of a final salary public sector pension, so we were able to gain a lot of traction. That was a subset of our campaign on business rates, which continue to destroy the great British High Street. Ask any business with shop floor space what they’d like to see change and it’s highly likely that cuts to business rates would top the list. Online shopping has helped deliver cheaper prices for consumers, so there’s no real need to attack that – but many customers like to visit shops and we will continue to make the case for cuts to ensure that shopkeepers can keep their doors open.

We were also somewhat successful in our campaign to
cut the 50p rate of income tax. This was put in place by Gordon Brown just months ahead of the 2010 election. Cynics might argue that he realised that Labour were likely to lose, so he set a trap for the incoming government. That said, it needed to be cut. It is unreasonable for the government to take half of someone’s money. Our campaign saw us distribute badges of a 50p coin snipped in half. The rate was eventually cut by George Osborne to 45p. We thought it should have been abolished completely, leaving a higher rate of 40p, but it was at least a move in the right direction.

Another ongoing TaxPayers’ Alliance campaign is on air passenger duty. Those on the lowest incomes can now afford to fly away on holiday, as it’s no longer the preserve of the rich. That’s an extraordinary story of economic progress – so much so that it’s taken for granted nowadays. But Brits pay one of the highest taxes on flying in the world, which means that well-earned holidays are still out of reach for some. Furthermore, air passenger duty is not an environmental tax – the government have said as much themselves.
We have visited regional airports making the case for cuts directly to holiday makers standing in the check-in queue. We’ve also worked in Westminster for change, delivering evidence to Select Committees and producing hard-hitting research notes. In 2018, we rallied former Cabinet Ministers, senior backbenchers and around 50 MPs to deliver a letter to the Treasury demanding air passenger duty be cut. We want those on the lowest incomes to enjoy the benefits of progress, which means that politicians have to realise that sky-high taxes on holidays are hugely damaging. In the 2018 Budget, the Chancellor froze short-haul air passenger duty and our campaign to get long-haul cut continues.

In 2018, we backed up a trio of historians including Tom Holland, Dan Snow and Ruth Scurr, who formed the Stonehenge Alliance to battle plans for a nearly two-mile-long tunnel, costing £1.6 billion, aimed at easing congestion on the A303 road near the ancient site. They feared damage to the Neolithic monument and its surrounding landscape and our report showed how that vast sum of money could be better spent on road transport improvements built more quickly in the south of England and South West.
Independently minded

How we are funded has been a source of fascination for many of our critics, fearing we are the plaything of some super-rich tax avoider. NIPSA, a Northern Ireland trade union, published a full-on attack on us in a paper called *Behind the Mask* and one of the worst accusations it could level was “it has been revealed that a [former] director of the TPA, Alexander Heath, does not in fact live or pay taxes in the UK. He has lived in France since 1973”. Where he has been paying even higher taxes to the French government!

The truth is far more prosaic with thousands of donors supporting us over the years, from an elderly couple who can spare a hundred pounds to a successful entrepreneur willing to put up £10,000. To protect the privacy of all our financial supporters, we have made it clear that we will not reveal their names. This is especially important today as social media has exposed any supporters of an organisation with a distinct message to a deluge of cyber bullying.

What we are very proud of is that we do not receive a single penny of taxpayers’ money – and never will. Too many think tanks in the past have been paid simply to amplify the policies of the government of the day.

Government funding of lobbying and political campaigning is just one of the ways in which the establishment distorts decision-making in favour of its own narrow interests, while expecting taxpayers to pick up the tab for propagating views they may well strongly disagree with. It only serves to strengthen the feeling that the political class is out of touch with common sense. We prefer to listen not lecture.
Our concerns come directly from our supporters and taxpayers’ generally. We are an organisation led by our members and supporters. We are not here to back government. Some critics claim we are too close to the Conservative Party, and yet it was our dismay at the direction of the Tory party back in 2002 that spurred us on to found the TaxPayers’ Alliance. Certainly our free market attitude is more in tune with centre-right politicians than out-and-out socialists, but we have not been afraid to highlight the failings of Conservative administrations.

We have relentlessly criticised the tremendous waste of public resources devoted to their High Speed 2 rail project (HS2). Not unsurprisingly, this has wrong-footed many of the assumptions about us, by teaming up with the Green Party in our common objection to this. We can do that because we do not depend on government patronage. In 2018, we launched our Great British Transport Competition, with cross-party support, inviting any interested groups or members of the public across the UK to submit ideas for infrastructure projects that would make better use of the £50 billion and rising budget for HS2.

One of our local grassroots coordinators, Matt Gillow, strongly put the case against HS2. “One argument for this diabolical white elephant is that it would ‘unlock’ the power of the North,” said Matt. “No, it wouldn’t. Without first
devolving fiscal power to local Northern administrations, HS2 would work hugely to the detriment of the North – rather than encouraging London-based firms to move northwards, there is next to no evidence that HS2 wouldn’t just encourage workers to move to the City”.

Our ongoing battle against HS2 is a good example of how, with traditional party politics in decline, people are more inclined to support a particular issue. Thanks in part to the ease of modern communications, people can now engage directly with bodies that more effectively express their concerns. The TaxPayers’ Alliance has certainly benefitted from this with our registered supporters steadily growing to 80,000 over the past 15 years. A donor or activist knows exactly what they are going to get from us. We do not take them for granted as some political parties do.

Our team has always been important to us and we are particularly proud of the fact that two of our key managers, John O’Connell and Matt Sinclair came up through the ranks. John started as a young intern and went on to become current
Chief Executive. Matt went from researcher to Chief Executive, a role in which he served from 2012 to 2014. Through flexible working, we have been able to retain expert staff, such as working mums Emma Bennett and Sara Rainwater who have led our operations and development for over ten years.

We’ve always liked to cultivate talent at the TaxPayers’ Alliance. The spokespeople we’ve had – including Mark Wallace, Susie Squire, Emma Boon, Robert Oxley, Andy Silvester, Dia Chakravarty, James Price and Chloe Westley – have all been strong media voices. With the advent of 24-hour news, broadcasters were hungry for commentators and we provided them with articulate people willing to go on TV to argue the case.

Many of our team have gone on to thrive elsewhere. In the world of politics, Emma Boon and Rob Oxley were special advisors to several Cabinet Ministers, while Susie Squire was an advisor to No 10 and James Frayne became Director of Communications at the Department for Education. In the media, Andy Silvester became a leader writer at The Sun, Dia Chakravarty Brexit Editor at the Daily Telegraph, and Mark Wallace Executive Editor of the website ConservativeHome. Matt Sinclair is now an Assistant Director at Deloitte, and most recently, our campaign manager James Price joined the Leader of the House of Lords as a Special Adviser.

The TaxPayers’ Alliance has a long tradition of working with young, passionate activists. Our War on Waste nationwide tour in 2014 wouldn’t have happened if it weren’t for the dedication shown by students and activists out on the ground. The tour was coordinated by Jennifer Salisbury-Jones and we stopped off at numerous towns and cities across the country to highlight the need for local politicians to cut
waste from their budgets before pleading poverty, and with a lot of travelling to do, our team went through many early mornings – after a few late nights! – to hit the road and cover as much ground as possible. Canterbury, Glasgow, Carlisle, Swansea. The pace was relentless and in between action days, our staffers joined to appear on local media and speak to politicians.

Dozens of students joined our stunt outside the Bank of England in 2015 to highlight the size of the national debt. After the Greatest Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials, today’s young people look set to be Generation Screwed. They are the ones that will have to pay through higher taxes for the demands of politicians today – that short-term mindset really does just pass the bill to our children and grandchildren. Little wonder, then, that so many students joined us, along with a news crew reporting live from the event. It can often be hard to engage people on the scale of the national debt, as the numbers are simply mind-boggling. But it’s one of the most important issues the country faces and it’s something that young people should be furious about.
Our friends

An important aspect of the TaxPayers’ Alliance is building alliances with other groups through joint events. One of our most glittering occasions was held in September 2010, when we invited over 200 delegates from taxpayer groups from around the world, including from as far away as South Korea and Japan, to join us for a conference followed by a gala dinner at London’s 600-year-old Guildhall. Inside the gothic magnificence of the Great Hall we hosted 450 guests, who listened to a keynote speech by the eminent economist Dr Arthur Laffer, a close adviser to both President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly when the 84-year-old Baroness Thatcher joined guests for drinks and was instantly surrounded by admirers. She told us how valuable the work of the TaxPayers’ Alliance was. There could
be no higher praise from the woman who led the charge against socialism and big government in the 1980s.

Every year we attend most political party conferences. At the Conservative Party Conference, we jointly host Think Tent with the Institute of Economic Affairs, bringing together MPs, journalists and policy makers to discuss free market solutions to current issues.

Mark Littlewood, Director General of the Institute of Economic Affairs, has been a stalwart ally of ours. “For fifteen years, the TPA has done an incredible job of defending the interests of British taxpayers,” says Mark. “Too often, debate simply focuses on how the government should spend money – not where it gets it from. Through an impressive programme of high quality research, vigorous campaigning and wall-to-wall media coverage, the TPA is transforming this debate. Money spent, often wastefully, by the state is money that is not left in the pockets of taxpayers”.

49
We have presented a number of stimulating discussions and debates that help liberate politicians from the strait jacket of their party lines. “The TPA continually and brilliantly reminds us that big government often produces poor results,” insists Mark, “limits individual freedom and stymies economic growth. If the TaxPayers’ Alliance didn’t exist, someone would have to invent it”.

Prime Minister Theresa May has praised our rigorous quest for data. “It is vital that taxpayers have the necessary information to hold the government to account,” she says, “and over the years the TPA’s efforts have helped to drive transparency. That means those who spend taxpayers’ money will do so more carefully than ever before and for that I applaud the team at TPA for their efforts”.

We continue to strengthen our friendships with centre-right groups in Westminster by hosting a monthly “Tuesday meeting”, inspired by Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, to discuss current areas of interest and common pursuits. Speakers have included Cabinet Ministers, Downing Street advisers, leading commentators and even US Congressmen.

We have always been keen to welcome support from all political quarters. Labour MP and former minister Tom Harris has said, “The TaxPayers’ Alliance has spent the last decade making life pretty uncomfortable for politicians and mandarins who like spending the public’s money. We owe them a debt of gratitude for that”. Another Labour MP, Kate Hoey, says, “The TaxPayers’ Alliance plays an important role in keeping us on our toes and reminding us at all times that the money that we allocate does not belong to the government – it is the public’s and must be used wisely”.
Always evolving

Looking back over the last 15 years, it is remarkable how much our method of campaigning has changed. “When we started out,” remembers Chief Executive John O’Connell, “a lot of work was needed to put together a list of journalists to send a press release by email. That hopefully led to coverage on TV, radio or the newspapers”.

Blogging then took off and that bypassed a lot of the traditional media outlets. Facebook and Twitter then dominated, and still do to an extent, but new platforms are emerging that have been used well by campaigners on all sides of the spectrum, like Snapchat, WhatsApp, and even Virtual Reality.

That said, traditional ground campaigning – speeches, rallies, leafleting, knocking on doors – proved extremely effective for the Labour Party in the 2017 general election. “Even as technology improves,” says Harry Fone, our
Grassroots Campaign Manager. “Talking to someone face-to-face still works. We make sure we move with the times, but we’ve always had traditional grassroots activism at our core. It’s our heart and soul, and we haven’t ever forgotten that”.

An advert might appear on the Facebook feeds of a million users – they may see it, or they may scroll past it entirely, such is the short attention span online. But if you can convince a room of a dozen people to take up a call to action, then that is arguably much more powerful. Embrace change, but don’t forget what works.

As to the future of the TaxPayers’ Alliance – the next 15 plus years – we have an excellent, dynamic team in place now. Our research team still produces an astonishing number of papers and briefings, with Phil Basey, Duncan Simpson, Ben Ramanauskas and Jeremy Hutton covering issues such as town hall waste, pensions and automation in the public sector.

We retain our anti-establishment side, and want to continue building up our connections with supporters around the country. James Roberts, Chloe Westley and Harry Fone make up the leanest and most effective campaign team in Westminster.

But we also want to consult more with government on changes in welfare and key policies. We will always work with organisations whose job it is to hold the executive to account, question where the money goes, and help them do their job better. Most recently, the 2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report named the TaxPayers’ Alliance the 18th best advocacy think tank and 25th top transparency and good governance think tank in the world.
All of that simply cannot happen without a stable organisation, run by a dedicated operations team. Sara Rainwater, Emma Bennett and Milly Skriczka give us the platform on which we base all of our important work.

We have much to celebrate since our beginning in 2004: widespread acceptance that the state is wasteful; openness in spending; caution about reward for failure by state employees; and quite a few tax cuts or reliefs from tax rises in beer duty, cider duty, petrol duty, work space parking and so much more.

Sometimes we are characterised as being philosophically opposed to any taxes at all. Of course taxation is essential to the functioning of a civilised state. But too often now it is used as an easy answer, a lazy option which more often than not results in a bloated government with increased and unnecessary control over us. There is an unending demand for ever new lifestyle taxes to shape our very lives. Sugar taxes, plastic taxes, meat taxes – taxation is too often deployed to expand the nanny state.
It will always be our position to help families and businesses stand up against the might of a state that likes to devise new ways of helping themselves to taxpayers’ money.

Most urgently, we need to take on a resurgent radical left wing populism. It’s been a long time since the 1970s and the Winter of Discontent. That formed the immediate background for a free market revolution in the 1980s against high tax and spending, but those era-defining events no longer resonate so strongly with younger generations. It is therefore our job to re-tell the story that electing a hard-left government would be a disaster for this country. It’s a battle we thought we had won, but it’s now more of a threat than ever.

If we have any future downturn or financial crisis, many people will think that the last time round we had the right-wing solution of “austerity” and bailing out the banks. This time they might be more attracted by a punishing left-wing solution. If we are to win freedom afresh for this new generation, there is a huge amount we’ve got to do.

Still, we are optimists; we’ve done it before. This time, polls reveal that among many young people there is a scepticism about big government and big corporations, a real desire to be self-employed, a dislike of people getting something for nothing, and a belief that hard work should be rewarded. Those qualities do still resonate and we need to find the right language to express them. That is our key challenge over the next few years, so it is an honour to carry on the fight to reform taxes, to cut waste and to speak up for British taxpayers.
About the authors

Andrew Allum co-founded the TaxPayers’ Alliance with Matthew Elliott when he was 35 and has been the non-executive and unpaid Chairman ever since. Andrew is a senior partner at L.E.K. Consulting, the global management consultancy, with particular interests in transport and the labour market impacts of technology.

Matthew Elliott co-founded the TaxPayers’ Alliance with Andrew Allum when he was 25 and, as its first Chief Executive, he oversaw its growth to become one of the leading taxpayer groups in the world. His most recent campaign success was as Chief Executive of Vote Leave, in the referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union in 2016, and he also led the successful NOtoAV campaign in the 2011 referendum on changing Britain’s voting system. Matthew has been described by the Financial Times as “one of the most formidable political strategists in Westminster,” by the New Statesman as “one of the most successful – and feared – campaigners in British politics” and by the BBC as “one of the most effective lobbyists at Westminster”. Alongside other commitments, he is now the Senior Political Adviser to Shore Capital. He has written four books, appears regularly on TV and radio, and is a frequent speaker both in the UK and overseas.
Acknowledgements

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Appendix I: research papers

2004
– Bumper book of government waste

2006
– Bumper book of government waste
– Flat tax: towards a British model
– The real cost of Gordon Brown
– Total lifetime tax
– Working life is easier in the public sector
– TPA response to the tax reform commission report
– Public sector rich list 2006
– The hundred club: Whitehall pensions
– Moving Britain backwards
– Annual non-job report 2006

2007
– Better government report
– The price of fish: costing the common fisheries policy
– Town hall rich list 2007
– Councillors’ allowances
– The dynamic impact of the 2007 budget
– Tax burden highest for the poorest households
– Budget 2007: tax cuts abroad
– Who wants to be a tax millionaire?
– An analysis of the more government/less government balance on *The Today* programme
– Investigating the global warming industry in local government
– Beyond the dome: government projects £23 billion over budget
– Cost of government day
– Green tokenism: government cars
– Hidden costs of Olympics 2012
– The non-courses report 2007
– The case against further green taxes
– TPA response: quality of life policy group report
– Council mileage allowances
– Council tax in the pre-budget report
– Public sector rich list 2007
– Council spending uncovered: publicity
– The tax on Christmas

2008

– Bumper book of government waste 2008
– Council spending uncovered: middle management pay
– Funding hate education
– Quango communication spending
– Council spending uncovered: middle management pay
– Council spending uncovered: pension contributions
– How to save £3.3 billion a year from the civil service
– HM Prison Service is failing: a new approach is urgently needed
– Town hall rich list 2008
– How cutting corporation tax would boost revenue
– The economic and political case against higher fuel duty
– The cost of crime in London
– Council spending uncovered: the ten percent challenge
– Public sector strikes
– Quangos report 2006-07: the unseen government of the UK
– The great British taxpayer rip-off
– The looming winter of discontent
– The failure of government management
– The cost of big brother government
– The cost of crime
– The burden of green taxes
– The case for abolishing regional development agencies
– Unequal shares: the definitive guide to the Barnett formula
– Gordon Brown’s economic failure
– Total lifetime tax update
– Brussels or Whitehall: locating the source of the UK’s regulatory burden
– The case against a mandatory target for emissions cuts
– Taxpayers’ Alliance response to the government’s £50 billion bailout
– Public sector rich list 2008
– Taxpayers’ Alliance response to the Conservative tax plan
– How inept regulations and poor policy decisions drove the financial crisis
– The EU’s renewables policy: official cost estimates to Britain
– Council spending uncovered: local authority publicity spending
– Regional development agencies: having a ball at the 2008 party conferences

2009

– Fleeced! How we’ve been betrayed by the politicians, bureaucrats and bankers
– Ten years on: Britain without the European Union
– Food for thought: how the common agricultural policy costs families nearly £400 a year
– Quango communication spending 2009
– Council spending uncovered: pension contributions
– An affordable voice for business
– Departmental use of air travel
– The great European rip-off
– Hate education since Annapolis
– Town hall rich list 2009
– Reforming EU development assistance
– Funding surprises from the EU grants list
– Speaking volumes: the European Commission’s libraries
– Could do better? grading the performance of British MEPs
– Can tax increases solve the United Kingdom’s public finance crisis?
– Tax and entreprenurship
– Departmental use of taxis and chauffeured cars
– MPs’ salaries: putting parliamentary pay into context
– Taxpayer funded lobbying and political campaigning
– NHS machines: utilisation of high-value equipment at NHS trusts
– Relative transport spending
– How to save £50 billion: reducing spending for sustainable public finances
– Council spending uncovered: the Prevent strategy
– EU diplomats
– The expensive failure of the emissions trading scheme
– Lost along the way: the cost of the UK’s international development programme
– How the government overspends on capital projects
– ACA to YJB: a guide to the UK’s semi-autonomous public bodies
– The cost of Copenhagen
– Parking fines: the £328 million enforcement industry
– A taxpayers’ guide to the party political responses to the fiscal crisis
– Public sector rich list 2009
– The economic cost of CO2 targets
– Ending the green rip-off
– Brown’s gold sales: the £5 billion mistake
– Members of the board: holding quangos to account
– The environment agency’s hypocrisy on short haul flights

2010

– Taxpayers’ Alliance manifesto
– The excessive cost of motoring taxes
– Towards transparent rewards
– The climate challenge fund
– Council pensions: the £53 billion black hole
– MPs’ pay – they don’t deserve more
– Strikes in the public and private sectors
– How to cut public spending (and still win an election)
– The expansion of the EU quangocracy
– Town hall rich list 2010
– Britain’s justice and home affairs opt-ins
– The band played on: EU taxpayers and the orchestration of European integration
– MPs’ resettlement grants
– The economic effects of rapid fiscal adjustment
– Regional development agencies exposed
– Trade union rich list 2010
– The TaxPayers’ Alliance manifesto: 3 months on
– The spirit illusion: a critical analysis of how ‘the spirit level’ compares countries
– Speeding fines
– The Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s purchase of EU flags
– Welfare reform in tough fiscal times
– Foreign Office Prevent grants
– Taxpayer funding of trade unions
– Party players: EU funding of party political research
– The underlying costs of EU defence integration
– Council savings: unnecessary jobs
– The real national debt: a decade of reckless growth
– Annual non-job report 2008
– Taxpayer funded environmentalism
– Britain and the ECHR
– Christmas tax 2010
– Pass the salt: road salt spending

2011
– 2020 tax commission: “fair” taxes
– High speed rail
– 2020 Tax Commission: the length of Tolley’s individual tax guides
– The number of bins each council collects
– A statistical analysis of secondary school spending
– Will HS2 create jobs?
– Town hall rich list 2011
– Empty property rates
– How to abolish national insurance
– HS2 capacity analysis
– Council mileage allowance spending
– Local policing summaries: how to save £1 million
– 2020 Tax Commission: corporation tax
– The TaxPayers’ Alliance manifesto: 1 year on
– Spending cuts poll 2011
– Trade union rich list 2011
– DFT internet usage
– Let them eat carbon
– How the taxman loses billions every year
– Update: trade union rich list 2011
– The hidden costs of HS2
– Council award ceremonies
– Transport for London surplus staff
– Wasting lives 2011
– Abolish national insurance: a simpler and more transparent tax system
– Midlands councils’ flights
– 2020 Tax Commission: true tax cost for everyday purchases
– Excessive taxes on motorists in each council area in the UK
– Industrial masochism
– Taxpayer funding of trade unions 2011
– Public sector pensions gap
– Terms of endearment
– The cost of staff suspended on full pay in Midlands councils
– Police authority budgets
– Cost of government day 2012

2012
– The EU in a nutshell
– Child support agency credit card spending
– The true cost of the LGPS
– Total lifetime tax
– Hampshire councils’ air travel
– The £28bn tax gap
– Council pensions: the £53 billion black hole
– Medicine use reviews
– Town hall rich list 2012
– The cost of collecting tax
– The Single Income Tax
– EU taxpayer funded environmentalism
– Council pension time bomb
– North East councils’ flights
– Councillors’ allowances
– Briefing: limitations of the right to time off for union responsibilities
– Whitehall procurement: departmental estates costs
– Staffing at Ofcom
– Trade union office space
– Taxpayer funding of trade unions 2012
– Flights taken by the Department of Energy and Climate Change
– Visible and available policing: the most and least efficient forces

2013
– One step forward, two steps back: the number of tax changes since may 2010
– Local authority middle management pay
– Empty property rates: the £1.1 billion tax bombshell
– Town hall rich list 2013
– How to fix corporate tax
– Three in ten homes to suffer stamp duty hike by 2017
– A quarter of homebuyers now getting hit with a stamp duty bill for £7500 or more
– Stamp duty – a counterproductive tax
– The tax on holidays
– EU fiscal factbook
– Work for the dole: a proposal to fix welfare dependency
– 201 ways to save money in local government
– Energy and water bills in the NHS

2014
– Spending factbook
– The £1.7 trillion invisible debt mountain: public sector pensions liabilities
– Bumper book of government waste 2014
– Council liabilities
– Town hall rich list 2014
– Unnecessary jobs in the Welsh emergency services
– Ministry of Defence civilian manpower
– Taxpayer funding of trade unions 2014
– Does international aid increase freedom in recipient countries?
– Trade union office space 2014
– Closing the deficit – uncertain times
– Distribution of tax burdens and benefit receipts

2015
– Budget 2015 briefing note
– Grounds and gardens maintenance costs in the NHS
– Council assets
– The real national debt
– The tax on holidays 2015
– The consequences of the direct recovery of debts
– The European development fund
– Unnecessary jobs in HS2
– Total lifetime tax
– The cost of police authorities vs the office of police and crime commissioners
– Distribution of tax burdens and benefit receipts 2015
– Taxpayers and bank bailouts
– Taxpayers’ TV
– Level failed: EU videogames
– Government art
– The single use plastic bag charge
– Taxpayer funding of trade unions: Northern Ireland
– Public sector rich list 2015
– Council tax since 1996-97
– The Spending Plan

2016
– Reforming capital taxes
– Sugar tax briefing
– Compensation claims against local authorities
– Proposals for a flat rate of tax relief on pension contributions
– Proposals for the reform of corporation tax
– Councillors’ allowances 2015
– The steel crisis explained
– Keeping council tax low in Windsor and Maidenhead
– Examples of how to save money and keep council tax low
– Defence acquisition
– The impact of the sugar tax on different drinks
– Members of the board
– Estimates of the effect of the soft drinks industry levy based on the sugar tax in Mexico
– Britain after Brexit: a positive view for taxpayers
– An estimate of the effect of the soft drinks industry levy on employment
– Taxing tenants: how taxes on landlords end up hitting tenants
– Rich man’s toy: the case for scrapping HS2
– The nanny state rich list
– Property taxes in the UK and the regions
– Total lifetime tax 2016
– The per person spending factbook
– Scotland’s over spending problem
– Merging income tax and national insurance
– Welsh local authority procurement card spending
– Tax gap: how cracking down on illicit trade could fund a 1p cut in the
basic rate of income tax
– Working for the taxman
– The sugar tax and the public finances
– Decentralise the tax system to meet future funding challenges
– NHS machines 2016

2017
– A fate worse than debt
– Making the taxman work for the taxpayer
– How much could HS2 end up costing taxpayers?
– The business rates revaluation
– Submission to the Treasury select committee
– Local authority facility time
– Town hall rich list 2017
– Inquiry into government accounts – written evidence
– The end of austerity?
– Reforming public sector procurement
– Local authority sales, fees and charges
– Public sector pay and strikes
– Trade union rich list 2017
– The tax on summer holidays
– For sale: environmental NGOs in Britain
– Why the cost of living is so high
– Young people and national insurance
– Council mileage allowances
– The impact of beer duty
– The efficacy of public health spending
– Why we shouldn’t increase borrowing
– The impact of beer duty increases on employment
– The growing burden of stamp duty towards 2021-22
– The impact of beer duty on investment
– Does borrowing pay for itself?
– Cutting EU waste – the taxpayer-friendly option for the EU’s post-Brexit budget
– Inflation tax
– A to Z of NHS prescriptions
– Government-approved Christmas day food
2018
– Nationalisation: the real rail rip-off
– Public sector paper procurement
– 20 years of council tax
– The A303 stonehenge tunnel: the best use of taxpayers’ money?
– The quangocrat rich list
– How the NUS wastes your money
– Town hall rich list 2018
– Independent NHS, simpler quangos
– Productivity dirty dozen – 12 policy failures
– NHS quango flights
– The jet-set Met
– Potential savings from the legalisation of cannabis
– Schools’ spending
– Automate the state: better and cheaper public services
– Local authority flights
– US Tax Cuts & Jobs Act: six months on
– Highest tax burden this year since 1969-70
– Spending on mayoral cars
– Pensions inequality
– Public sector trade union rich list
– Air passenger duty evidence submission
– Autumn budget briefing
– Business rates reform
– Briefing: five more years of historic high tax burden
– The tax on Christmas 2018
– Nanny state approved Christmas lunch
– Nanny state rich list 2018

2019
– Mandarins pension pots
– Council award ceremonies
– Planning for intergenerational unfairness

The full archive of TaxPayers’ Alliance research can be found at www.taxpayersalliance.com
Appendix II:

Current staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Joined</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Allum</td>
<td>Chairman (unpaid)</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Basey</td>
<td>Editorial Director</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma Bennett</td>
<td>Finance Director</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiana Bristol</td>
<td>Development Director</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Fone</td>
<td>Grassroots Campaign Manager</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Hutton</td>
<td>Policy Analyst</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John O’Connell</td>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Rainwater</td>
<td>Operations Director</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Ramanauskas</td>
<td>Policy Analyst</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Roberts</td>
<td>Political Director</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duncan Simpson</td>
<td>Policy Analyst</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milly Skriczka</td>
<td>Development Manager</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chloe Westley</td>
<td>Campaign Manager</td>
<td>2017</td>
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Research fellows

Simon Cook
Mike Denham
Dr Lee Rotherham
## Appendix III: former staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former</th>
<th>Joined</th>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew Elliott</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Alex Wild</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola Murphy-Paige</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Eleanor McGrath</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eben Wilson</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Katie Kurilecz</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<td>Peter Cuthbertson</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Lee Canning</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Frayne</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Dia Chakravarty</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blair Gibbs</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Sonia Khan</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corin Taylor</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Andy Silvester</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew Sinclair</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Jennifer Salisbury-Jones</td>
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<td>Fiona McEvoy</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Jordan Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim Aker</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Katherine Gray</td>
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<td>Glyn Gaskarth</td>
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<td>Harry Davis</td>
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<td>Maria Fort</td>
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<td>Tom Banks</td>
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<td>Susie Squire</td>
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<td>Meg Hanks</td>
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<td>Lee Rotherham</td>
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<td>James Price</td>
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<td>Jennifer Dunn</td>
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<td>Jan Zeber</td>
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<td>Katherine Andrew</td>
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<td>Theo Hutchinson</td>
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<td>Andy Whitehurst</td>
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<td>Steven Edington</td>
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<td>Emma Boon</td>
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<td>Rory Meakin</td>
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<td>Dominique Lazanski</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrew Allison</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim Newark</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlotte Linacre</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Daniel</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Oxley</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jonathan Isaby</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Darren Rutland</td>
<td>2011</td>
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</table>
Appendix IV: advisory council

Tim Andrews, Executive Director of the Australian Taxpayers’ Alliance

James Bartholomew, Journalist & Author of *The Welfare State We’re In* and *The Welfare of Nations*; Director of the Museum of Communist Terror

Dr Eamonn Butler, Director of the Adam Smith Institute

Dr Tim Congdon CBE

Dr Stephen Davies, Head of Education at the Institute of Economic Affairs

Emma Dean, Political consultant

Mike Denham, Economist

Kevin Dowd, Professor of Finance and Economics at the Durham University Business School

Stephen Herring, former Head of Taxation at the Institute of Directors

Troy Lanigan, President and CEO of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Dominique Lasanzki, Last Press Label and GSMA

Ruth Lea CBE, Economic Adviser at Arbuthnot Banking Group

Patrick Minford, Professor of Applied Economics at the Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University

David B. Smith, Economist and Author

James Tooley, Professor of Education Policy at Newcastle University

Jordan Williams, Executive Director of the New Zealand Taxpayers’ Union
Appendix V: photo captions

Page 6
Andrew Allum and Matthew Elliott on the first grassroots Action Day with the key volunteers who helped get the TPA off the ground – Florence Heath, Nicola Murphy-Paige, Saul Row and Eben Wilson.

Page 8
Coverage of our first *Bumper Book of Government Waste* in *The Sun*.

Page 9
Emma Boon makes TPA history with our first appearance on the BBC’s flagship political show *Question Time*.

Page 10
TaxPayers’ Alliance HQ at 55 Tufton Street.

Page 11
The Debt Clock outside Parliament.

Page 12
*The Sun* endorsed our 2013 Freeze Fuel Tax campaign.

Page 13
TPA Chief Executive Jonathan Isaby joined by Chancellor George Osborne and British Pub and Beer Association Chief Executive Brigid Simmonds at the Mash Beer Tax victory party.

Page 14
Campaign Director Rob Oxley and South West Coordinator Tim Newark presenting our petition on cider tax to the Treasury.

Page 16
Harry Fone, Duncan Simpson and James Robert were joined by local activists Henry Pickett and Lucy Steel at St Mary’s stadium to protest the ‘Air Tax’.

Page 18
Coverage for our *Town Hall Rich List* in *The Times*.

Page 20
Our *Public Sector Rich List* covered on the front page of the *Daily Mail*.

Page 22
The front cover of *How to save £50 billion*.

Page 23
The front cover of *How to Cut Public Spending (and still win an election)*.

Page 24
Hundreds of activists gathered at our Rally Against Debt in Parliament Square in 2011.

Page 26
The front cover of *The Spending Plan*. 
Page 27
Research Director Alex Wild, Chief Executive Jonathan Isaby, and report Editor Rory Meakin addressing parliamentarians on the details of *The Spending Plan*.

Page 28
The poster from the *Daily Express* campaign against inheritance tax, which we joined in 2006.

Page 29
Jonathan Isaby and John O’Connell outside No 10 Downing Street.

Page 31

Page 32
Andrew Neil at the launch of *The Single Income Tax*.

Page 35
TPA campaigners in Islington campaigning against stamp duty.

Page 37
Matthew Elliott and Matt Sinclair in Times Square after accepting the 2013 Templeton Freedom Award.

Page 38
Campaign Manager Chloe Westley on the BBC’s *Question Time*.

Page 40
Our ‘Axe the 50p tax’ campaign badges.

Page 41
TPA campaigners at Bristol airport campaigning against air passenger duty.

Page 44
A local London businessman joining in on a TPA Action Day.

Page 45
Campaigning against the HS2 vanity project.

Page 47
Students gathered outside the Bank of England to protest the size of the national debt.

Page 48
Matthew Elliott introducing Dr Art Laffer to Baroness Thatcher at our gala dinner in 2010.

Page 49
Andrew Allum chairing a panel discussion on automation at Think Tent.

Page 51
John O’Connell discussing a project with a policy analyst.

Page 53
A group of MPs gathered for breakfast to support our campaign against a proposed meat tax.
In 2004, public spending in the UK was out of control. Andrew Allum and Matthew Elliott decided enough was enough, and came together to set up the TaxPayers’ Alliance. It fights to reform taxes and public services, cut wasteful spending and speak up for British taxpayers. Over the last 15 years, the group has grown, equipping a grassroots network with the tools to spread its message to millions, both on the ground and online. It has brought its vision to the heart of government. And this is the full story of how they did it.