

20/12/2014

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The ninth annual **Halifax Quality of Life Survey** tracks where living standards are highest in the United Kingdom by ranking local performance across key indicators covering: the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education, health, and personal well-being. The survey is based on data at local authority district (LAD) level and examines all 405 local authorities. Data has also been gathered from a number of sources, including: Halifax, Point Topic (Broadband data), ONS, DEFRA, the Met Office, the Department for Transport, Department of Children, Schools and Families, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Government, and the Scottish Executive.

Hart beats all other areas in the UK to top the Halifax Quality of Life Survey

The tranquil district of Hart in north east Hampshire tops the 2014 Halifax Quality of Life Survey for the most desirable place to live – for a record fourth year in succession.

The Halifax Quality of Life Survey has placed Hart in the top spot based on its high performance in a wide range of measures, including: residents' health and life expectancy, overall well-being, employment, a low crime rate, relatively good weather, and good broadband internet access.

What makes Hart such a good place to live in?

- Residents tend to be fit and well – over 97% reporting good or fairly good health.
- Average life expectancy is the joint highest in the UK (83 years for men).
- The employment rate is high with four out of five of 16-64 year olds in occupation.
- Many residents enjoy high incomes, with average weekly earnings of £839 – 33% higher than the UK average of £629.
- Inhabitants live in relative security with one of the lowest crime rates in the country.
- Residents enjoy a relatively good climate – less rainfall per year than the national average (736 mm against 879 mm) and more weekly sunshine hours (32.5 hours against the national average of 29.5 hours).
- 95% of all households have a good level of broadband access – compared to 87% for the UK as a whole.
- Importantly, the latest ONS figures indicate the Hart adult population is among the most happy, satisfied and content in the UK.

On the flip side, the cost of living in Hart is much higher than in many other parts of the UK – with an average house price that is 7.4 times the average annual pre-tax local income, compared to a national average of 6.2.

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Movement in the top ten

Elmbridge in Surrey, four times winner of this survey, has moved up to second place (having dropped to sixth in 2013). The survey shows a high proportion of inhabitants here are fit and well, with 97% reporting good health and a high average life expectancy of 81.5 years. The employment rate is also high at 82%, and those in full time occupation typically enjoy high incomes with weekly average earnings of £1,104. School performance is also strong with 84% of 15 years olds achieving five or more GCSE results at grades A-C.

Besides Elmbridge, there were several other big climbers in the top 10, with Rutland climbing seventeen places to fourth spot, Chiltern rising ten places to fifth, Warwick moving from forty-second position in 2013 to eleventh in 2014 and Richmond upon Thames up thirty nine places to fifteenth position.

The main reason for these big changes is that the personal well-being of adults appears to have improved since 2013; with adults more satisfied, happy, and less anxious about their lives.

Martin Ellis, economist at Halifax, comments:

"Hart tops the Halifax quality of life survey for the fourth successive year. This is a remarkable achievement given the stiff competition that Hart has from several other areas. The leafy Hampshire district scores highly on several indicators such as: health, life expectancy, employment, average earnings, school results, and even the weather. Importantly adults rated themselves highly in a recent ONS personal well-being survey; they are satisfied, happy, believe what they do in life is worthwhile and are less anxious about their lives.

"A regional comparison shows many areas in southern England score strongly in categories such as the labour markets and health. Northern areas tend to perform well on education and lower house prices in relation to earnings. In Scotland and Wales, several areas enjoy low traffic flows and burglary rates."

Four out of five top 50 areas for the best places to live in southern England

The top 50 places to live in the UK are again dominated by the South East with over half (26) found in this region, followed by East of England which claims eleven of the top 50 spots (see Table 1).

Areas from outside the south in the top 50 include Rutland (4th), South Northamptonshire (7th), Rushcliffe in Nottingham (8th), Warwick (11th), the Orkney Islands (47th), and Hambleton in North Yorkshire (50th).

Southern areas tend to receive higher ratings for weekly earnings, the weather, health, and life expectancy. Whereas Northern areas score well on education in terms of grades and smaller class sizes, lower house prices in relation to earnings, and lower traffic flows.

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Key facts

Labour Market

- **Employment** is highest in Eden in Cumbria at 87.0%, ahead of Dacorum in Hertfordshire (85.4%) and North Dorset (85.2%). The UK average is 71.9%.
- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in Kensington & Chelsea at £1,372 per week, followed by City of London at £1,115p/w, Elmbridge at £1,104 p/w, Westminster at £1,056 p/w and St. Albans at £1,010 p/w. The UK average is £629 p/w.
- **The proportion of adults (16 years and over) with the highest level of qualification gained** (such as a degree, NVQ level 4 and above or professional qualification) is the highest in the City of London (94.8%), followed by Richmond upon Thames (70.4%), and Wandsworth (69.6%) – all significantly above the national average of 34.8%.

Housing

- **The biggest homes** are in Uttlesford in Essex, Chiltern, South Buckinghamshire and Rutland which all have an average of 6.4 habitable rooms. The smallest homes are in the City of London, Tower Hamlets, and Westminster (all below 4.0 habitable rooms). The average number of habitable rooms in the UK is 5.5.
- 100% of homes in East Ayrshire have **central heating**; the national average is 96%.
- Only four areas in the top 250 in the country have an **average house price to earnings ratio** which is at or below the UK historical long-term average of 4.0; Omagh (3.82), Fermanagh (3.89), North Lincolnshire (3.96) and Western Isles (4.0). The highest ratios are all in London boroughs: Hammersmith and Fulham (13.2), Camden and Hackney (both 12.3). The national average is 6.2.
- **80% of local area districts households have access to superfast broadband**, i.e. where download speed is greater than 25 megabits per second (Mbps). They include several areas in Greater Manchester (such as Manchester and Trafford), York, and Ards in Northern Ireland. Across all areas of the UK the majority of households have a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of 2Mbps is regarded as the minimum for good broadband service).

Urban Environment

- The Western Isles and Highlands takes the top spot for lowest **population density**, with just nine people per square kilometre, compared to a UK average of 264. At the other end of the scale, the most populated areas per square kilometre are all in London: Islington (14,517), Tower Hamlets (13,798), and Hackney (13,511).

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- The lowest **traffic levels** are found in the Western Isles with just 67 vehicles per square kilometre, Highland (100 vehicles/km), Isle of Scilly (125 vehicles/km) and Argyll & Bute (126 vehicles/km). The UK average is 8,804 vehicles/km.
- Orkney Islands has **the lowest burglary rate per 10,000 people (1.0)** followed by Western Isles (5.4), North Norfolk (7.3), Broadland in the East of England (8.0), and Eden in the North West (8.1).
- Six of the ten areas with **the lowest CO₂ emissions** are in London. The lowest emissions are found in Newham which has (1.4 tonnes of CO₂ per household), followed by Tower Hamlets (1.5 tonnes CO₂ per household) and Southwark and Hackney (both 1.6 tonnes CO₂ per household). The national average is 2.0 tonnes of CO₂ per capita.

Physical Environment

- **The lowest average annual rainfall** (525mm) is in Castle Point in Essex. Nine of the ten driest districts in the UK are in the East of England. In the UK average annual rainfall is 878.8 mm.
- Conversely, **the sunniest place in the UK** is the Isle of Wight where residents enjoy an average of 36.9 hours of sunshine a week. The national average is 29.5 hours.

Health

- **The healthiest districts** are all in the South, with Hart, Wokingham and Isles of Scilly all having 97% or more households rating themselves in good or fairly good health. Seven of the top ten areas are found in the South East, with the remaining found in the East of England (2), and Scotland (1). In the UK as a whole 94.6% of households rate themselves as in good or fairly good health.
- **Life expectancy for males at birth** is highest in Hart and South Cambridgeshire (83 years). The UK average is 79.3 years.

Education

- **Primary school class sizes** are smallest in Scotland, with seven of the 10 local authority districts with the smallest primary school classes here. The Western Isles has the lowest in the UK with 17.0 compared to a national average of 26.4.
- **The best GCSE results** in England are in South Tyneside where 93.0% of pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A-C followed by Bromley (92.9%), Slough (92.5%) and Kensington and Chelsea (92.1%). All are above the UK average of 82.4%.

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Personal Well-Being

- **Personal well-being is based on four categories – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety:**
 - Adults (16 and over) in Antrim in Northern Ireland have the highest average rating for **life satisfaction** in the UK. Based on a score out of ten, the adults in Antrim had an average rating of 8.8. The UK average is 7.5.
 - With a rating of 8.9 (out of ten) adults in Fermanagh and Antrim believe what they do in life is **worthwhile**, the highest average rating in the UK. The national average is 7.8.
 - The **happiest** adults are in Moyle, Fermanagh and Antrim, also in Northern Ireland, with all having an average rating of 8.4 – significantly higher than the UK average of 7.4.
 - Adults in Richmondshire in North Yorkshire, Wolverhampton and Antrim are the least **anxious** with an average rating of just 1.8. The average for the UK is 2.9.

Table 1: 2014 Halifax Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 Local Authority Districts in the UK

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2014	Ranking 2013
Hart	South East	1	1
Elmbridge	South East	2	6
Winchester	South East	3	9
Rutland	East Midlands	4	21
Chiltern	South East	5	15
Uttlesford	East of England	6	2
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	7	3
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	8	7
Wokingham	South East	9	8
Waverley	South East	10	4
Warwick	West Midlands	11	42
St Albans	East of England	12	23
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	13	11
Sevenoaks	South East	14	47
Richmond upon Thames	London	15	54
Bracknell Forest	South East	16	39
Mid Sussex	South East	17	17
Huntingdonshire	East of England	18	90
Mole Valley	South East	19	12

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Press Release



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Surrey Heath	South East	20	24
South Oxfordshire	South East	21	57
Stratford-on-Avon	West Midlands	22	35
Guildford	South East	23	64
Babergh	East of England	24	85
Chelmsford	East of England	25	10
Windsor and Maidenhead	South East	26	14
Reigate and Banstead	South East	27	27
East Hertfordshire	East of England	28	5
Basingstoke and Deane	South East	29	67
West Oxfordshire	South East	30	79
Tunbridge Wells	South East	31	29
North Hertfordshire	East of England	32	55
South Kesteven	East Midlands	33	18
Kensington and Chelsea	London	34	87
Rugby	West Midlands	35	80
Woking	South East	36	36
Bromley	London	37	72
Ashford	South East	38	78
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	39	22
North Kesteven	East Midlands	40	19
Aylesbury Vale	South East	41	44
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	42	56
Wealden	South East	43	99
Maidstone	South East	44	91
Mid Suffolk	East of England	45	34
Wycombe	South East	46	53
Orkney Islands	Scotland	47	50
Epsom and Ewell	South East	48	16
Central Bedfordshire	East of England	49	43
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	50	58

Source: Halifax December 2014

Table 2: Local Authority District with the Best Quality of Life in each region in 2014

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2014
Hart	South East	1
Rutland	East Midlands	4
Uttlesford	East of England	6
Warwick	West Midlands	11
Richmond upon Thames	London	15

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Orkney Islands	Scotland	47
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	50
South Gloucestershire	South West	60
Monmouthshire	Wales	98
Cheshire East	North West	100
Fermanagh	Northern Ireland	138
Northumberland	North East	166

Source: Halifax December 2014

Table 3: Local Authority District with the Best Quality of Life in each category in 2014

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour (UK average is 71.9%)	Highest employment rate: 87.0%	Eden	North West
(UK- £629 per week)	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £1,372	Kensington and Chelsea	London
(UK – 34.8%)	% of adults (16+) with highest qualification gained: 94.8%. This includes graduate and post postgraduate degrees, NVQ level 4 and above, and professional qualifications.	City of London	London
Housing (UK – 5.5)	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4	Uttlesford Chiltern South Buckinghamshire Rutland	East of England South East South East East Midlands
(UK – 96.0%)	Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%	East Ayrshire	Scotland
(UK – 6.2)	Lowest House price to earnings ratio: 3.57	Larne	Northern Ireland
(UK – 87.0%)	% of households with more than 2Mbps – and where more than half of household have chance of having superfast broadband: 100%	Manchester York Southend-on-Sea Brent Woking Ards	North West Yorkshire and the Humber East of England London South East Northern Ireland
Urban environment (UK- 264 per	Lowest Population density per sqr km: 9	Western Isles Highland	Both Scotland

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sq/km)			
(UK- 8,804 cars/km)	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 67 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
(UK-37.4 per 10,000 people)	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 1.0 per 10,000 people	Orkney Isles	Scotland
(UK – 2.0 tonnes CO ₂ emissions per household)	Lowest Total Consumer CO₂ Emissions: 1.4 tonnes per household	Newham	London
Physical environment (UK – 878.8 mm per year)	Lowest average annual rainfall: 525mm	Castle Point	East of England
(UK- 29.5 hours per week)	Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 36.9 hours	Isle of Wight	South East
Health (UK – 94.6%)	Highest % of residents in good health: 97.4%	Hart	South East
(UK -79.3 years)	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 83.0 years	Hart South Cambridgeshire	South East East of England
Education (UK-26.4 pupils per class)	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 17	Western Isles	Scotland
(UK- 82.4%)	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 94.3	Shetland Islands	Scotland
Personal Well Being (UK- 7.5 from 10)	Highest Life Satisfaction rating out of 10: 8.8	Antrim	Northern Ireland
(UK- 7.8 from 10)	Highest Worthwhile rating out of 10: 8.9	Fermanagh Antrim	Northern Ireland
(UK- 7.4 from 10)	Highest Happiness rating out of 10: 8.4	Moyle Fermanagh Antrim	Northern Ireland
(UK- 2.9 from 10)	Lowest levels of Anxiety rating out of 10: 1.8	Richmondshire Wolverhampton Antrim	Yorkshire and the Humber West Midlands Northern Ireland

Source: Halifax December 2014

Ends

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Notes to editors:

The Quality of Life index aims to quantify where living standards are highest in the United Kingdom by ranking local performance across a range of indicators covering the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education, health and personal well-being. The index has been produced at a local authority district level for all 405 Local Authority Districts in the UK.

The quality of life reading for each local authority has been created by summing scores across 21 variables within 7 broad groups.

Each local authority district is given a score out of 10 for each variable contained in the index. Scores within each of the broad groups are averaged and then the seven group scores are summed to create an overall quality of life score.

See separate technical note for more information on methodology of index and data sources.

Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	Jul 2013-Jun 2014
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2014 Northern Ireland (NI) – April 2013, NISRA (both up rated by average weekly earnings index to September 2014)
	% of adults(16+) with highest qualification gained	2011 Census data
Housing	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – Housing Conditions Survey 2009/11 Northern Ireland November 2014 Halifax data
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – housing Conditions Survey 2009/11 NI – Halifax Data to November 2014.
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to November 2014
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic June 2014
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2013 – ONS
	Traffic flows per square km	2013
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	British Crime Survey 2011/12 Scotland 2011/12; Northern Ireland 2011/12
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2012 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2012)
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Met Office Average 2009/2013
	Annual sunshine hours	Met Office Average 2009/2013
Health	% in good or fairly good health	2011 Census

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	Life expectancy at birth for males	England, Wales & Scotland 2011/13; Northern Ireland 2010/12
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	January 2014 England; Wales, and Northern Ireland 2013/14; Scotland 2013
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2012/2013 England; 2013/14 Wales; Scotland 2013; Northern Ireland 2012/13
Personal Well-Being	Life Satisfaction	April 2013-March 2014 ONS
	Worthwhile	April 2013-March 2014 ONS
	Happiness	April 2013-March 2014 ONS
	Anxiety	April 2013-March 2014 ONS

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