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The eighth 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.

Three in a row for Hart as it hangs on to title of best place to live

The leafy Hampshire district of Hart has kept its crown as the most desirable place to live in the UK for the third year in a row, according to the 2013 Halifax Quality of Life Survey.

However, there were several big climbers in the top 10, with South Northamptonshire climbing 27 places to third, Rushcliffe up from 22nd to seventh, and Winchester up from 34th to ninth. The main reason behind these changes was the inclusion of a new ONS survey into people's personal wellbeing.

The annual Halifax Quality of Life Survey takes a wide range of factors into account, including residents' health and life expectancy, crime rate, weather, employment, school results, broadband access, and personal wellbeing.

Hart residents typically healthy, wealthy and happy

Hart has managed to retain its position at the top of the Quality of Life Survey by scoring consistently highly across almost all categories:

- Hart residents are the healthiest in the UK, with 97.4% reporting being in good or fairly good health. They also live the longest in the UK, with an average male life expectancy of 82.9 years compared to the national average of 79 years.
- The 80% employment rate is significantly higher than the national average (71%), while gross average weekly earnings of £843 are £226 (or 37%) higher than the UK average of £616.
- New ONS figures indicate the adult population is among the most happy, satisfied and content in the UK.
- The cost of living in Hart, however, is high; the average house price in Hart is 7.0 times the average annual pre-tax local income – higher than the UK average of 5.8.

Uttlesford moves into second place

The Essex district climbed up from sixth in 2012, having performed particularly well on employment (84%) and weekly average earnings (£819); while 97% of residents enjoy good or fairly good health; and at 81.8 years men have a higher than average life expectancy. But, living Uttlesford is also expensive, with an average house price to earnings ratio of 7.0.

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However, what has most helped Uttlesford is the new ONS survey which reveals adults here believe, more than in any other part of the UK, that what they do in life is worthwhile (scoring 8.4 out of 10). And as such they are among the most satisfied and happiest in the country (see Table 3).

Martin Ellis, economist at Halifax, comments:

"The old adage of 'Health, Wealth and Happiness' is the traditional measure of a good quality of life. For the third year running Hart has delivered against a range of indicators to demonstrate its residents have the best quality of life in the UK.

"The Hampshire district scores highly on most of the measures used, including health, life expectancy, employment, average earnings, low crime, and relatively good weather. These factors are reflected in the fact that adults in Hart rate themselves among the happiest and least anxious in the country and believe what they do in life is worthwhile."

South dominates top 50, but northern areas also well represented

The top 50 places to live in the UK are again dominated by the South East with almost half (24) found in this region, well ahead of the East of England which claims twelve of the top 50 spots (see Table 1).

However, the number of areas outside the south in the top 50 has doubled in the last 12 months to 12: and now includes South Northamptonshire (3rd), Rushcliffe in Nottingham (7th), Rutland (21st), Harrogate (33rd), Stratford-on-Avon (35th), and the Orkney Islands (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.

Key facts

Labour Market

- **Employment** is highest in South Northamptonshire at 88.9%, ahead of Watford (86.1%) and Brentwood (85.8%).
- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in Kensington & Chelsea at £1,323 per week, followed by City of London at £1,281p/w, Elmbridge at £1,179 p/w and Westminster at £1,137 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%.

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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 two areas in the top 250 in the country have an **average house price to earnings ratio** which is below the UK historical long-term average of 4.0; Western Isles and West Lothian (both 3.9). The highest ratios are all in London boroughs: Camden (12.0), Hammersmith and Fulham (11.6), and Haringey (11.0).
- **In seven out of ten local area districts households have access to superfast broadband**, i.e. where download speed is greater than 25 megabits per second (Mbps). They include Sheffield, Kingston upon Thames, and Belfast. 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 takes the top spot for lowest **population density**, with just nine people per square kilometre, compared to a UK average of 253. At the other end of the scale, the most populated areas per square kilometre are all in London: Islington (14,203), Tower Hamlets (13,304), and Hackney (13,225).
- The lowest **traffic levels** are found in Western isles, Highland, Argyll and Bute, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands. The highest traffic flows are in Watford, Gosport, and the City of London.
- 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 (1.3 tonnes of CO₂ per household), followed by Tower Hamlets (1.33 tonnes CO₂ per household) and Hackney (1.49 tonnes CO₂ per household). The national average is 2.0 tonnes of CO₂ per capita.

Physical Environment

- **The lowest average annual rainfall** (508 mm) is in Castle Point in Essex. Eight of the ten driest districts in the UK are in the East of England.
- Conversely, **the sunniest place in the UK** is the Isle of Wight where residents enjoy an average of 37.4 hours of sunshine a week. The national average is 29.7 hours.

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Health

- **The healthiest districts** are all in the South, with Hart, Wokingham, Isles of Scilly, and Elmbridge all having 96% or more households rating themselves in good or fairly good health. Six of the top ten areas are found in the South East, with the remaining found in the East of England (2), South West (1) and Scotland (1).
- **Life expectancy for males at birth** is highest in Hart and East Dorset (82.9 years), some three years longer than the national average.

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 16.0 compared to a national average of 25.9.
- **The best GCSE results** in England are in Craven in North Yorkshire where 94.6% of pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A-C followed by Epsom and Ewell (93.3%), North Kesteven in Lincolnshire, Bromley and Sutton (all 93.2%).

Personal Well-Being

- **Personal well-being is based on four categories – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety:**
 - Adults (16 and over) in Fermanagh in Northern Ireland have the highest average rating for **life satisfaction** in the UK. Based on a score out of ten, the adults in Fermanagh had an average rating of 8.2. The UK average is 7.5.
 - With a rating of 8.4 (out of ten) adults in Strabane and Uttlesford believe what they do in life is **worthwhile**, the highest average rating in the UK. The national average is 7.7.
 - The **happiest** adults are in Fermanagh and Moyle, also in Northern Ireland, with both having an average rating of 8.2 – significantly higher than the UK average of 7.3.
 - Adults in Fermanagh are also the least **anxious** with an average rating of just 1.6 (out of ten), followed by Antrim and Wolverhampton (both 1.9). The average for the UK is 3.0.

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

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2013
Hart	South East	1
Uttlesford	East of England	2
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	3
Waverley	South East	4
East Hertfordshire	East of England	5
Elmbridge	South East	6

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Rushcliffe	East Midlands	7
Wokingham	South East	8
Winchester	South East	9
Chelmsford	East of England	10
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	11
Mole Valley	South East	12
Vale of White Horse	South East	13
Windsor and Maidenhead	South East	14
Chiltern	South East	15
Epsom and Ewell	South East	16
Mid Sussex	South East	17
South Kesteven	East Midlands	18
North Kesteven	East Midlands	19
Horsham	South East	20
Rutland	East Midlands	21
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	22
St Albans	East of England	23
Surrey Heath	South East	24
East Hampshire	South East	25
Maldon	East of England	26
Reigate and Banstead	South East	27
South Buckinghamshire	South East	28
Tunbridge Wells	South East	29
South Norfolk	East of England	30
Melton	East Midlands	31
Eastleigh	South East	32
Harrogate	Yorkshire and The Humber	33
Mid Suffolk	East of England	34
Stratford-on-Avon	West Midlands	35
Woking	South East	36
St Edmundsbury	East of England	37
City of London	London	38
Bracknell Forest	South East	39
Rochford	East of England	40
Malvern Hills	West Midlands	41
Warwick	West Midlands	42
Central Bedfordshire	East of England	43
Aylesbury Vale	South East	44
Test Valley	South East	45
Ryedale	Yorkshire and The Humber	46
Sevenoaks	South East	47
Isles of Scilly	South West	48

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Fareham	South East	49
Orkney Islands	Scotland	50

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

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2013
Hart	South East	1
Uttlesford	East of England	2
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	3
Harrogate	Yorkshire and The Humber	33
Stratford-on-Avon	West Midlands	35
City of London	London	38
Isles of Scilly	South West	48
Orkney Islands	Scotland	50
Cheshire East	North West	105
Northumberland	North East	130
Monmouthshire	Wales	149
Fermanagh	Northern Ireland	180

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

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour (UK average is 71.0%)	Highest employment rate: 88.9%	South Northamptonshire	East Midlands
(UK- £616.30 per week)	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £1,323	Kensington and Chelsea	London
(UK – 34.7%)	% of adults (16+) with highest qualification gained: 94.8%. This includes graduate and post graduate degrees, NVQ level 4 and above, and professional qualifications.	City of London	London
Housing (UK – 5.1)	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4	Uttlesford and Rutland, and Chiltern, and South Bucks	East of England, and South East
(UK – 96.0%)	Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%	East Ayrshire	Scotland
	Lowest House price to earnings ratio:3.4	Copeland	North West
(UK – 81.0%)	% of households with more than 2Mbps – and where more half of household have chance of having superfast broadband: 100%	Doncaster, Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham, and Tamworth	Yorkshire and The Humber, and the West Midlands

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Urban environment (UK- 253 per sq/km)	Lowest Population density per sqr km: 9	Western Isles	Scotland
(UK- 8,857 cars/km)	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 65 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 Islands	Scotland
(UK – 2.0 tonnes CO ₂ emissions per household)	Lowest Total Consumer CO₂ Emissions: 1.3 tonnes per household	Newham	London
Physical environment (UK – 881.9 mm per year)	Lowest average annual rainfall: 508mm	Castle Point	East of England
(UK- 29.7 hours per week)	Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 37.4 hours	Isle of Wight	South East
Health (UK – 94.6%)	Highest % of residents in good health: 97.4%	Hart	South East
(UK -79.0 years)	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 82.9 years	Hart East Dorset	South East South West
Education (UK-25.9 pupils per class)	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 16.0	Western Isles	Scotland
(UK- 80.6%)	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 94.6	Craven	Yorkshire and the Humber
Personal Well Being (UK- 7.5 from 10)	Highest Life Satisfaction rating out of 10: 8.2	Fermanagh	Northern Ireland
(UK- 7.7 from 10)	Highest Worthwhile rating out of 10: 8.4	Uttlesford Strabane	East of England, Northern Ireland

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(UK- 7.3 from 10)	Highest Happiness rating out of 10: 8.2	Fermanagh and Moyle	Northern Ireland
(UK- 3.0 from 10)	Lowest levels of Anxiety rating out of 10: 1.6	Fermanagh	Northern Ireland

Ends

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 2012-Jun 2013
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2012 Northern Ireland (NI) – April 2011, NISRA
	% 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 2008/10
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – housing Conditions Survey 2008/10 NI – Halifax Data to 12 months to October 2011.
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to November 2013
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic December 2012
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2012 – ONS; 2012 for Northern Ireland
	Traffic flows per square km	2012
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	2011/12 NI – 2010/11
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2012 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2011)
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008

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

This report is prepared from information that we believe is collated with care, however, it is only intended to highlight issues and it is not intended to be comprehensive. We reserve the right to vary our methodology and to edit or discontinue/withdraw this, or any other report. Any use of this report for an individual's own or third party commercial purposes is done entirely at the risk of the person making such use and solely the responsibility of the person or persons making such reliance.

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