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**NOT FOR BROADCAST OR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00.01HRS Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>  
December 2012**

The seventh 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 and health. The survey examines all 405 local authority districts and is based on data at local authority district (LAD) level. Data has 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.

## Happy and healthy Hart tops 2012 Quality of Life Survey

The 2012 Halifax Quality of Life Survey reports the leafy district of Hart officially remains the best place to live in the UK.

Based on a range of factors, including residents' health and life expectancy, employment, crime rate, weather, and even good broadband internet access, the annual Halifax Quality of Life Survey concludes this quiet corner of Hampshire retains the accolade for the second year in a row.

### **(The best) home is where Hart is**

Hart remains at the top of the Quality of Life Survey by scoring consistently highly in almost all categories:

- The employment rate is significantly higher than the national average (70.2%) at 78.6%, while gross weekly earnings are 37% higher than the UK average at £830.
- A high proportion (95.3%) of residents report being in good or fairly good health compared to a national average of 91%.
- As such, life expectancy is also higher than the UK average (79) at 81.7 years for men.
- Crime rates are among the lowest in the country, with a burglary rate of just 16.6 per 10,000 people compared to an average of 37 for the UK.
- Broadband speed is high, with 94.2% of households enjoying a good level of broadband access<sup>1</sup>, compared to the national average of 82%.
- On top of this Hart has a favourable climate, with an average of 32.9 hours of sunshine per week (national average (30) and an average rainfall of 746mm (national average 882mm).
- However, there is a cost associated with a high quality of life and house prices in Hart are 6.7 times the average annual local income – significantly higher than the UK average of 5.4.

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Taking silver for the second year in a row is Elmbridge in Surrey, which held the top spot in the survey for three years running from 2008 to 2010. Known locally as Britain's Beverly Hills the employment rate may be lower at 70.7% but gross weekly earnings are significantly higher at £1,162.

Similarly, 94.7% of residents enjoy good or fairly good health and average life expectancy is 81.8 years. However, at nine times income the average house price to earnings ratio is even higher and traffic flows are more than double that of Hart.

#### **Martin Ellis, economist at Halifax, comments:**

"Taking a wide range of indicators into account, residents of Hart are still able to say they enjoy the best quality of life in the UK. The Quality of Life Index shows a wide range of districts coming out on top for each of the different indicators used.

"While not necessarily being the leading district across all measures, Hart comes out on top because it scores consistently highly across nearly all indicators. In particular, Hart residents enjoy good health, high employment, low crime, and high quality schooling."

#### **South dominates top 50**

The top 50 places to live in the UK are dominated by the South East with the top five spots found here and more than half (30) found in this region, well ahead of the East of England which claims eleven of the top 50 spots. The three other places making up the top five are: Tunbridge Wells (3<sup>rd</sup>), Wokingham (4<sup>th</sup>), and Waverley (5<sup>th</sup>). (See table 1).

There are just six areas outside the south in the top 50: Rushcliffe in Nottingham (22<sup>nd</sup>), South Northamptonshire (30<sup>th</sup>), Rutland (36<sup>th</sup>), Solihull in Birmingham (42<sup>nd</sup>), South Kesteven in Lincolnshire (46<sup>th</sup>), and Harborough in Leicestershire (47<sup>th</sup>)

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

#### **Key facts**

- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in Kensington & Chelsea at £1,303 per week, followed by City of London at £1,262 per week, and Elmbridge at £1,162 per week.
- **Employment** is highest in Suffolk Coastal at 85.8%, just ahead of Ribble Valley in Lancashire at 84.7%, and Adur in West Sussex at 84.4%.

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- **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 (3.4).
- **Nine out of ten households have a good level of broadband access** (i.e. a download speed of 2Mbps is regarded as the minimum for good broadband service) in slightly over half of the local authority districts surveyed. In some of the areas such as Epsom & Ewell, Kensington & Chelsea and Richmond upon Thames, potentially all households have broadband access at this level.
- None of the top 250 areas in the country have an **average house price to earnings ratio** which is below the UK historical long-term average of 4.0. The highest ratio is in South Buckinghamshire where the average price is 9.2 times local annual average earnings. The lowest house price to earnings ratio is in Strabane in Northern Ireland at 2.9.
- 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.
- Orkney Islands has **the lowest burglary rate per 10,000 people (1.0)** followed by Western Isles (5.4) and North Norfolk in the East of England (7.3).
- Scotland takes the top spot for lowest **population density** too, with just 8 people per square kilometre in the Western Isles and 9 in the Highlands, compared to a UK average of 251.
- The ten areas with **the lowest CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** are all in Southern England. The lowest emissions are found in Tower Hamlets which has (1.6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per household). The national average is 2.4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita.
- **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.
- **The healthiest districts** are all in the South, with Wokingham, Isles of Scilly, Hart and Surrey Heath all having 95% or more households rating themselves in good or fairly good health. Nine of the top ten areas are found in the South East, with the other found in the South West.
- **Life expectancy for males at birth** is highest in Kensington & Chelsea (85.1 years), some six years higher than the national average.

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- **Primary school class sizes** are smallest in Scotland, with four of the 10 local authority districts with the smallest primary school classes coming from here. Western Isles has the lowest in the UK with 15.2 compared to a national average of 26.
- **The best GCSE results** in England are in Sutton where 93% of pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A-C followed by Bromley (92.9%), Darlington in the North East (92.3%) and East Dunbartonshire in Scotland (91.8%).

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

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2012
Hart	South East	1
Elmbridge	South East	2
Tunbridge Wells	South East	3
Wokingham	South East	4
Waverley	South East	5
Uttlesford	East of England	6
Chelmsford	East of England	7
Chiltern	South East	8
East Hertfordshire	East of England	9
Sevenoaks	South East	10
St Albans	East of England	11
Maldon	East of England	12
Windsor and Maidenhead	South East	13
Reigate and Banstead	South East	14
Surrey Heath	South East	15
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	16
South Buckinghamshire	South East	17
Epsom and Ewell	South East	18
Kensington and Chelsea	London	19
Bracknell Forest	South East	20
Horsham	South East	21
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	22
Mole Valley	South East	23
Richmond upon Thames	London	24
Guildford	South East	25
Vale of White Horse	South East	26
Rochford	East of England	27

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Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2012
Brentwood	East of England	28
Wycombe	South East	29
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	30
South Oxfordshire	South East	31
Mid Sussex	South East	32
Bromley	London	33
Winchester	South East	34
Fareham	South East	35
Rutland	East Midlands	36
Aylesbury Vale	South East	37
Maidstone	South East	38
West Oxfordshire	South East	39
Tandridge	South East	40
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	41
Solihull	West Midlands	42
Ashford	South East	43
West Berkshire	South East	44
Runnymede	South East	45
South Kesteven	East Midlands	46
Harborough	East Midlands	47
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	48
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	49
Central Bedfordshire	East of England	50

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

Local Authority	Region	Ranking
Hart	South East	1
Uttlesford	East of England	6
Kensington and Chelsea	London	19
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	22
Solihull	West Midlands	42
East Dorset	South West	53
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	91
Cheshire East	North West	133
Northumberland	North East	173
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	183
Monmouthshire	Wales	202

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

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour	Highest employment rate: 85.8%	Suffolk Coastal	East of England
	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £1,303	Kensington and Chelsea	London
Housing	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4	Chiltern Uttlesford Rutland South Buckinghamshire	South East East of England East Midlands South East
	Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%	East Ayrshire	Scotland
	Lowest House prices to Earnings ratio: 2.9	Strabane	Northern Ireland
	% of households with good level of broadband access (i.e. a minimum download speed of 2Mbps): 100%	Epsom & Ewell Kensington and Chelsea Richmond Upon Thames	South East London London
Urban environment	Lowest Population density per sq km: 8	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 65 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 1.0 per 10,000 people	Orkney Islands	Scotland
	Lowest % of vacant properties: 0.1%	Waveney	East of England
	Lowest Total Consumer CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions: 1.6 per household	Tower Hamlets	London
	Physical environment	Lowest average annual rainfall: 508mm	Castle Point
Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 37.4 hours		Isle of Wight	South East
Health	Highest % of residents in good health: 95.5%	Wokingham	South East
	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 85.1 years	Kensington and Chelsea	London
Education	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 15.2	Western Isles	Scotland
	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 93%	Sutton	London

**Ends**

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# Press Release



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## Notes to editors:

The Quality of Life index aims to quantify where living standards are highest in United Kingdom by ranking local performance across a range of indicators covering the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education and health. 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 17 variables within 6 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 six 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
<b>Labour</b>	Employment rate %	July 2011- June 2012
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2012
<b>Housing</b>	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 Census; Scotland HCS 2008/10; Northern Ireland 2011
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 Census; Scotland HCS 2008/10; Northern Ireland 2011
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to November 2012
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic - December 2012
<b>Urban environment</b>	Population density per square km	2011 – ONS; 2009 for Northern Ireland
	Traffic flows per square km	2011
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	2011/12 Northern Ireland 2010/11
	% of Vacant Properties	2011 England and Wales, 2010 Scotland, Northern Ireland
	CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions per tonne per capita	2011 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2010)
<b>Physical environment</b>	Average annual rainfall mm	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008
<b>Health</b>	% in good or fairly good health	2001 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	2008/10
<b>Education</b>	Number of pupils in primary school class	2012 January England; 2011 Wales 2011 Scotland; and 2010/11 Northern Ireland
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2011/12 England and Northern Ireland; 2009/10 Wales; 2011 Scotland

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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.

For the latest housing research, previous releases, and for information on the Halifax House Price Index, please follow this link:

[http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/media1/economic\\_insight/economic\\_insight\\_homepage.asp](http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/media1/economic_insight/economic_insight_homepage.asp)

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<sup>i</sup> Above the minimum download speed of 2Mbps

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