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The sixth 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.

HART HITS TOP SPOT IN 2011 HALIFAX QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY

Residents may know it already, but now it is official - the tranquil Hampshire district of Hart has long been a desirable location to live and today tops the annual Halifax Quality of Life Survey for 2011.

The Halifax Quality of Life Survey has placed Hart in the top spot based on residents' health and life expectancy, employment, a low crime rate, relatively good weather, and factors such as good broadband internet access.

What makes Hart such a good place to live in?

- Residents tend to be fit and well - 95% reporting good or fairly good health.
- Average life expectancy is higher than average (81.7 years for men).
- The employment rate is high with almost three-quarters of 16-64 year olds in occupation, with many residents enjoying high incomes with weekly average earnings of £841 which is 40% above the UK average of £606.
- 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 (746 mm against 882 mm) and more weekly sunshine hours (33 hours against the national average of 29.7 hours).
- 91% of all households have a good level of broadband access – compared to 82% for the UK as a whole.
- However, living the good life comes with a price – average house prices in Hart are 6.3 times average annual local earnings, considerably above the UK average of 5.25.

Hart is closely followed by Elmbridge which has held the top position in the survey for the past three years. The Surrey district scores well on employment rate (74%), weekly average earnings (£1,127); 95% of residents enjoy good or fairly good health and live on average for 81.8 years. However, living there is also expensive, with an average house price to earnings ratio of 7.82.

The top 50 best places to live in the UK is dominated by areas in southern England, with just over half (27) in the South East and a further 15 areas in the East of England. These areas include East Cambridgeshire (4th), St. Albans (7th), Maidstone (8th), South Cambridgeshire (9th), Epsom and Ewell (10th), and Tunbridge Wells (12th).[See Table 1]

There are just four areas outside the south in the top 50; Wychavon in Worcestershire (6th), Rushcliffe in Nottingham (16th), Rutland (22nd) and North Kesteven in Lincolnshire (36th).

Areas in the south tend to score highly on weekly earnings, the weather and health and life expectancy. Whereas areas in the north tend to receive high ratings on low house price to earnings ratios, environmental measures such as low population densities and low traffic flows, as well as smaller primary school sizes.

Martin Ellis, economist at Halifax, commented:

"Looking across a range of indicators residents of Hart in Hampshire enjoy the best quality of life in the UK. They benefit from a combination of above average weekly earnings, a low crime rate and good health amongst other factors. On the other hand, average house prices in the area are amongst the highest relative to local earnings, highlighting that a high standard of living often comes at a price."

Key Facts

Employment is highest in Maidstone in Kent where the rate is 84.0%, closely followed by the Shetland Islands, (83.8%) and West Somerset (83.7%).

The highest weekly average earnings are in Kensington & Chelsea (£1,521 per week) followed by City of London (£1,239), Westminster (£1,141) and Elmbridge (£1,127).

The biggest homes are in Wychavon in Worcestershire with an average of 7.4 habitable rooms; followed by Derbyshire Dales and Hertsmere (both 7.0).

90% of homes in the Western Isles have **central heating**, closely followed by Blackburn with Darwen (89%).

The lowest percentage of vacant properties is in Waveney (0.1%).

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 one in three of the local authority districts surveyed. In some of the areas in central London, such as the City of London and Kensington & Chelsea, potentially all households have broadband access at this level.

There are only 26 areas across the country where the **average house price to earnings ratio** is below the UK historical long-term average of 4.0. The lowest ratio is in Pendle in Lancashire (3.5), followed by North Ayrshire and Blaenau Gwent (both 3.6). The highest ratio is in Kensington & Chelsea, where the average price is 12.2 times local annual average earnings.

Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland, which has 8 of the 10 best ranked districts on this measure. The lowest traffic levels are in the Western Isles, the Highlands, Argyle and Bute, Orkney and Shetland Islands. The Isles of Scilly and Powys are the two areas outside Scotland in the top 10.

The lowest burglary rates per 10,000 households are in the Western Isles (3.8) followed by the Orkneys (5.0), West Devon (7.8) and North Norfolk (7.9).

The ten lowest CO₂ emissions per person are all in southern England. The lowest emissions are in Tower Hamlets (1.50 tonnes of CO₂ per household), followed by Southwark (1.60 tonnes) and Camden (1.68 tonnes). The national average is 2.21 tonnes per capita.

The lowest population density in Britain is in the Western Isles and the Highlands with just 9 persons per square kilometre. The average for the UK is 257.

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; Medway and Barking and Dagenham are the only areas outside the East of England in the top 10.

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.

Good health scores most highly in Wokingham, Isles of Scilly, Hart and Surrey Heath in the South East with 95% of households rating themselves in good or fairly good health in all these areas. Nine of the top ten areas on this measure are in the South East.

Life expectancy is highest in Kensington & Chelsea (85.1 years), followed by Westminster (83.8 years) and East Dorset (82.0 years). The top ten in this category is dominated by local authority districts in southern England.

Primary school class sizes are smallest in the Western Isles (14 pupils), followed by Shetland Islands and the Orkneys (both 17). Five of the ten local authority districts with the smallest average primary school class sizes are in Northern Ireland.

The best GCSE results in England are in Darlington where 92%¹ achieved five or more GCSE results – grades A-C, followed by Hammersmith and Fulham, Sutton, East Dunbartonshire, Shetland Islands, and Kensington and Chelsea (all over 90%).

Table 1: Halifax Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 Local Authority Districts in United Kingdom in 2011

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life Ranking
Hart	South East	1
Elmbridge	South East	2
Wokingham	South East	3
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	4
Brentwood	East of England	5
Wychavon	West Midlands	6
St Albans	East of England	7
Maidstone	South East	8
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	9
Epsom and Ewell	South East	10
Richmond upon Thames	London	11
Tunbridge Wells	South East	12
East Hertfordshire	East of England	13
Waverley	South East	14
Aylesbury Vale	South East	15
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	16
Guildford	South East	17
Uttlesford	East of England	18
Bracknell Forest	South East	19
North Hertfordshire	East of England	20
Hertsmere	East of England	21
Rutland	East Midlands	22
Wycombe	South East	23
Rochford	East of England	24
Mole Valley	South East	25
Chiltern	South East	26
Ashford	South East	27
Colchester	East of England	28
Winchester	South East	29
Kingston upon Thames	London	30
Kensington and Chelsea	London	31
Reigate and Banstead	South East	32
Fareham	South East	33
Huntingdonshire	East of England	34
South Oxfordshire	South East	35
North Kesteven	East Midlands	36
Dacorum	East of England	37
Sevenoaks	South East	38
Chelmsford	East of England	39
Test Valley	South East	40
Mid Sussex	South East	41
Vale of White Horse	South East	42
Horsham	South East	43
Maldon	East of England	44
Woking	South East	45
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	46
Basingstoke and Deane	South East	47
Central Bedfordshire	East of England	48
Gravesham	South East	49
Bromley	London	50

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

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2011
Hart	South East	1
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	4
Richmond upon Thames	London	11
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	16
Wychavon	West Midlands	6
Tewkesbury	South West	72
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	68
Warrington	North West	122
Northumberland	North East	162
Shetland Islands	Scotland	98
Monmouthshire	Wales	234
North Down	Nothern Ireland	275

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

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour	Highest employment rate: 84%	Maidstone	South East
	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £1,520	Kensington and Chelsea	London
Housing	Highest average number of rooms in house: 7.4	Wychavon	West Midlands
	Largest % of houses with central heating: 90%	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest House prices to Earnings ratio:3.5	Pendle	North West
	% of households with good level of broadband access (i.e. a minimum download speed of 2Mbps): 100%	City of London and Kensington & Chelsea	London
Urban environment	Lowest Population density per sqr km: 9	Western Isles and Highlands	Scotland
	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 65 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 3.8 per 10,000 people	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest % of vacant properties: 0.1%	Waveney	East of England
	Lowest Total Consumer CO ₂ Emissions: 1.5 per household	Tower Hamlets	London
Physical environment	Lowest average annual rainfall: 508mm	Castle Point	East of England
	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: 14.4	Western Isles	Scotland
	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 92%	Darlington	North East

Editors' Notes:

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.

Note: ¹ GCSE results for England are provisional, final figures to be published in early 2012.

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

Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	April 2010- March 2011
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2011
Housing	Number of rooms in house	12 months to October 2011 -
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	12 months to October 2011 -
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to October 2011 -
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	December 2010
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2010 – ONS; 2008 for Northern Ireland
	Traffic flows per square km	2010
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	2010/11-
	% of Vacant Properties	2011 England and Wales, 2010 Scotland, Northern Ireland
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2011 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2009)
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008
Health	% in good or fairly good health	2001 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	2008/10
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	2011 January England; 2010/11 Wales 2009 Scotland; and 2010/11 Northern Ireland
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2010/11 England; 2009/10 Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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Ends

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/halifax_house_price_index_page.asp

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