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The fourth annual **Halifax Quality of Life Survey** tracks where living standards are highest in Great Britain by ranking local performance across key indicators; covering the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education and health. The survey covers 408 local authority districts and is based on data at local authority (LA) level. Data has been gathered from a number of sources, including the ONS, DEFRA, the Met Office, the Department for Transport, Department of Children, Schools and Families, the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Executive and Experian.

## Elmbridge Tops Quality of Life Survey For The Second Year In A Row

**Elmbridge has come out top in the annual Halifax quality of life survey for the second year in succession.** Inhabitants of this Surrey local authority district tend to be in good health, with 95% reporting good health, and a high average life expectancy of 81.1 years. Those in full time employment typically enjoy high incomes with weekly average earnings of £1,064 and over three-quarters (76%) of residents own their own home.

**On several other indicators, Elmbridge ranks above the national average,** including employment rate (82.3% compared to the national average of 75.5%); school qualifications (71% achieve five or more GCSE results grades A-C compared to the national average of 69.5%) and residents enjoy a relatively good climate. There is, on average, less rainfall per year than the national average (676 mm against 871 mm) and more weekly sunshine hours (32.7 hours against the national average of 30.0).

**East Hertfordshire is ranked second, followed by Surrey Heath, Uttlesford, and Sevenoaks.** All of these areas score well on average earnings, employment, home ownership, size of houses and health measures.

Twenty-eight of the 30 local authorities with the highest quality of life are in southern England. **Rutland in East Midlands has the best quality of life outside southern England. The top ranked local authorities in northern England – all in the top quarter across the country - are Castle Morpeth in the North East (43<sup>rd</sup>) and two areas in North Yorkshire: Hambleton (85<sup>th</sup>) and Harrogate (94<sup>th</sup>).** In Castle Morpeth and Harrogate weekly average earnings are above the national average. Owner occupation is higher than in the rest of the country and houses tend to be bigger than the average size in Britain. Traffic flows and burglary rates in these three northern areas are much lower than the national average.

**The top ranked local authority in Scotland is Aberdeenshire (153<sup>rd</sup>),** which has a high employment rate, excellent secondary education grade results and low crime levels.

**The top ranked local authority in Wales is The Vale of Glamorgan (194<sup>th</sup>).** Residents in The Vale of Glamorgan tend to have higher than average earnings, larger than average houses and low crime levels.

## **Nitesh Patel, housing economist at Halifax, commented:**

“Elmbridge tops the Halifax quality of life survey for the second successive year. Elmbridge scores highly on several indicators, such as health, life expectancy, employment, average earnings and school results.

"Many areas in southern England score strongly in categories such as the labour and housing markets. Northern areas tend to perform well on physical environment characteristics, particularly on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and lower percentages of empty homes. In Scotland and Wales, several areas enjoy low traffic flows and burglary rates."

### **Quality of Life Performance by Category**

#### **Labour market**

- **Gosport in Hampshire has the highest employment rate (86.7%)**, followed by Hart and Purbeck (both 86.6%) and Blaby and Orkney Islands both (85.7%).
- **Average earnings are highest in Kensington & Chelsea (£1,306 per week)** followed by City of London (£1,196 per week) Westminster (£1,132) and Elmbridge (£1,064 per week).

#### **Housing market**

- **The owner-occupation rate is highest in Castle Point in the East of England (88%)** and Blaby in the East Midlands (87%).
- **South Buckinghamshire and Chiltern have, on average, the biggest houses in Great Britain.** The average house in those areas has 6.4 rooms, followed by Rutland and Hart (both 6.3).
- **Just over 99% of houses in Easington in the North East have central heating.**

#### **Urban Environment**

- **2.0% of dwellings, or less, are vacant in 295 (72%) local authority areas.** The lowest percentage of vacant properties is in Salisbury (0.02%).
- **Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland, accounting for 7 out of the 10 best ranked districts on this measure.** The lowest traffic levels are in the Western Isles, the Highlands and Isles of Scilly.
- **The lowest burglary rates per 10,000 households are in the Western Isles (5.0), Teesdale (5.6) and Eden (6.7).**
- **Six of the ten local authorities with the lowest per household CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are in London.** The lowest emissions in Great Britain are in Tower Hamlets (23.6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per household), followed by Southwark (23.7 tonnes) and Barking and Dagenham (24.1 tonnes). The national average is 28.7 tonnes per household.

#### **Physical Environment**

- **Castle Point has the lowest average annual rainfall (508 mm)** followed by Thurrock (545 mm), Rochford and Southend-on-Sea (both 546 mm). Eight of the top ten driest districts in Great Britain are in the East of England.
- **Residents of the Isle of Wight enjoy an average of 37.4 hours of sunshine a week, the most in Great Britain,** followed by Hastings (36.7 hours) and Weymouth & Portland (36.5 hours). Six of the ten local authorities with the most sunshine hours are in the South East and four are in the

South West. Wansbeck in Northumberland (31.8 hours per week) is the sunniest place outside southern England.

## Health

- **95% of households in Wokingham in the South East rate themselves in good or fairly good health**, making it the healthiest district in Britain. Nine out of the top ten areas on this measure are in the South East.
- **Life expectancy is highest in Kensington & Chelsea (84 years)**, followed by Westminster (82 years) and East Dorset (81 years). The top ten in this category is dominated by local authorities in southern England.

## Education

- **The average primary school class size is smallest in the Isles of Scilly (12 pupils)**, followed by Orkney Islands (13) and the Western Isles (14). Six of the ten local authorities with the smallest primary school class sizes are in northern Scotland.
- **The best GCSE results in England are in Kensington & Chelsea and Sutton, where 84% of 15 year olds achieved five or more GCSE results, grades A-C**, followed by Hammersmith & Fulham (82%) and Gateshead (81%). Six of the ten local authorities with the best GCSE results are in London.
- **In Scotland, 90% of S4 students in East Dunbartonshire gained 5 awards at level 4 or better**, the highest ranking in the country, followed by East Renfrewshire, Shetland Islands and the Western Isles (all 89%).
- **In Wales, 65% of students in the Powys had five or more GCSE results grades A-C**, the highest ranking in the country, followed by Gwynedd, Neath Port Talbot and The Vale of Glamorgan (all 62%).

**Table 1: Quality of Life Rankings – the top 30 Local Authorities in Great Britain 2009**

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Quality of Life Ranking</b>
Elmbridge	South East	1
East Hertfordshire	East of England	2
Surrey Heath	South East	3
Uttlesford	East of England	4
Sevenoaks	South East	5
South Bucks	South East	6
Hart	South East	7
Guildford	South East	8
Chiltern	South East	9
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	10
St Albans	East of England	11
Wokingham	South East	12
Waverley	South East	13
Aylesbury Vale	South East	14
Horsham	South East	15
East Dorset	South West	16
Wealden	South East	17
Winchester	South East	18
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	19
Rutland	East Midlands	20
Tandridge	South East	21
Wycombe	South East	22
Blaby	East Midlands	23
Kensington and Chelsea	London	24
Richmond upon Thames	London	25
Brentwood	East of England	26
Chelmsford	East of England	27
Mid Sussex	South East	28
Woking	South East	29
Reigate and Banstead	South East	30

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

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Quality of Life ranking 2009</b>
Castle Morpeth	North East	43
Macclesfield	North West	104
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	85
Bromsgrove	West Midlands	31
Rutland	East Midlands	20
East Hertfordshire	East of England	2
Kensington and Chelsea	London	24
Elmbridge	South East	1
East Dorset	South West	16
The Vale of Glamorgan	Wales	194
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	153

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

Group	Variable	Local Authority	Region
<b>Labour</b>	Highest employment rate: 86.7%	Gosport	South East
	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £1,306	Kensington and Chelsea	London
<b>Housing</b>	Highest owner Occupation rate: 88%	Castle Point	East of England
	Highest average Number of rooms in house: 6.4	South Buckinghamshire	South East
	Largest % of houses with central heating: 99.3%	Easington	North East
<b>Urban environment</b>	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 66 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest burglary rate per 1000 population: 5 per 1000 people	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest % of vacant properties: 0.02%	Salisbury	Scotland
	Lowest CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions per tonne per capita: 23.63 per household	Tower Hamlets	London
<b>Physical environment</b>	Lowest average annual rainfall: 508mm pa	Castle Point	East of England
	Most weekly sunshine hours: 37.4 hours	Isle of Wight	South East
	Highest % of residents in good health: 95.5%	Wokingham	South East
<b>Health</b>	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 84 years	Kensington and Chelsea	London
	Lowest No. of pupils in primary school class: 12	Isles of Scilly	South West
	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 84%	Kensington and Chelsea and Sutton	London

**Editors' Notes:**

The Quality of Life index aims to quantify where living standards are highest in Great Britain by ranking local performance across a range of indicators, including the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education and health. The index has been produced at a local authority level for all 408 LAs in Great Britain.

The quality of life reading for each local authority has been created by summing scores across 15 variables within 6 broad groups.

Each local authority 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 %	April 2008- March 2009
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	Apr-09
<b>Housing</b>	Owner Occupation rate %	2007. Regional data for 2001-07 used to project forward 2001 Census.
	No of rooms in house	2008. Regional data for 2001-08 used to project forward 2001 Census.
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	2006. Regional data for 2001-06 used to project forward 2001 Census.
<b>Urban environment</b>	Traffic flows per square km	2008
	Burglary rate per 1000 population	2008-09-England & Wales 2008-09 Scotland
	% of Vacant Properties	2008
	CO2 Emissions per tonne per capita	2006 from Experian Plc
<b>Physical environment</b>	Average annual Rainfall	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008
<b>Health</b>	% in good health	2001 Census
	life expectancy at birth for males	2007
<b>Education</b>	No. of pupils in primary school class	2009- England & Wales 2008- Scotland
	% of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2008/09 England & 2007/08 Wales 2008/09 Scotland

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