

The Rebuilding Britain Index

Levelling-up 2.0: delivering a
continuing shared priority

October 2022

Final report



Foreword

Changes of government offer an opportunity to re-focus on key issues. With Levelling Up, the challenge has not gone away; as the RBI has demonstrated, the UK has made little to no material progress on achieving the worthy objectives set out in the Levelling Up White Paper. There needs to be a re-set not just on the politics of Levelling Up, but on the substance and most importantly on delivery. How this is done, and where, is of intense interest to people, as it impacts their daily lives.

Since the start of 2021 Legal & General (L&G), through the Rebuilding Britain Index (RBI), has collected thousands of data points and has captured sentiment from 35,000 UK households. The findings have been concerning and consistent: the social and geographic inequalities that the UK has been looking to address, appear as vast as ever – and in some cases appear to be widening further, not helped by the current cost-of-living crisis.

The turbulence that the UK is currently experiencing again reaffirms the importance of addressing the economic, energy and wider structural challenges facing the UK. Rebuilding and Levelling-Up the UK is clearly going to take a lot of time. But this should not be taken as a reason for inaction – if anything, it reaffirms the need for urgent and meaningful action to commence immediately.

It is for this reason that the announcement of the creation of the first 38 potential Investment Zones across England to stimulate economic growth should provide some cause for optimism.

There is ambition and appetite to move quickly on providing support to these zones and it is encouraging that the Government is looking to combine firm policy with an

approach that looks to address some of the planning and regulatory barriers that often stall development in economic and physical infrastructure where it is most needed.

That the approach appreciates the importance of increasing the stock of affordable residential housing, and indeed, wider infrastructure development as part of any focused efforts to boost local productivity should also be welcomed. None of the issues factored into the RBI are islands unto themselves. Building this nuance into plans will require devolved and empowered local decision-making.

What, though, should remain unchanged is the recognition that all parts of the UK should be able to benefit from the same opportunities and live happy, fulfilling, healthy and productive lives.

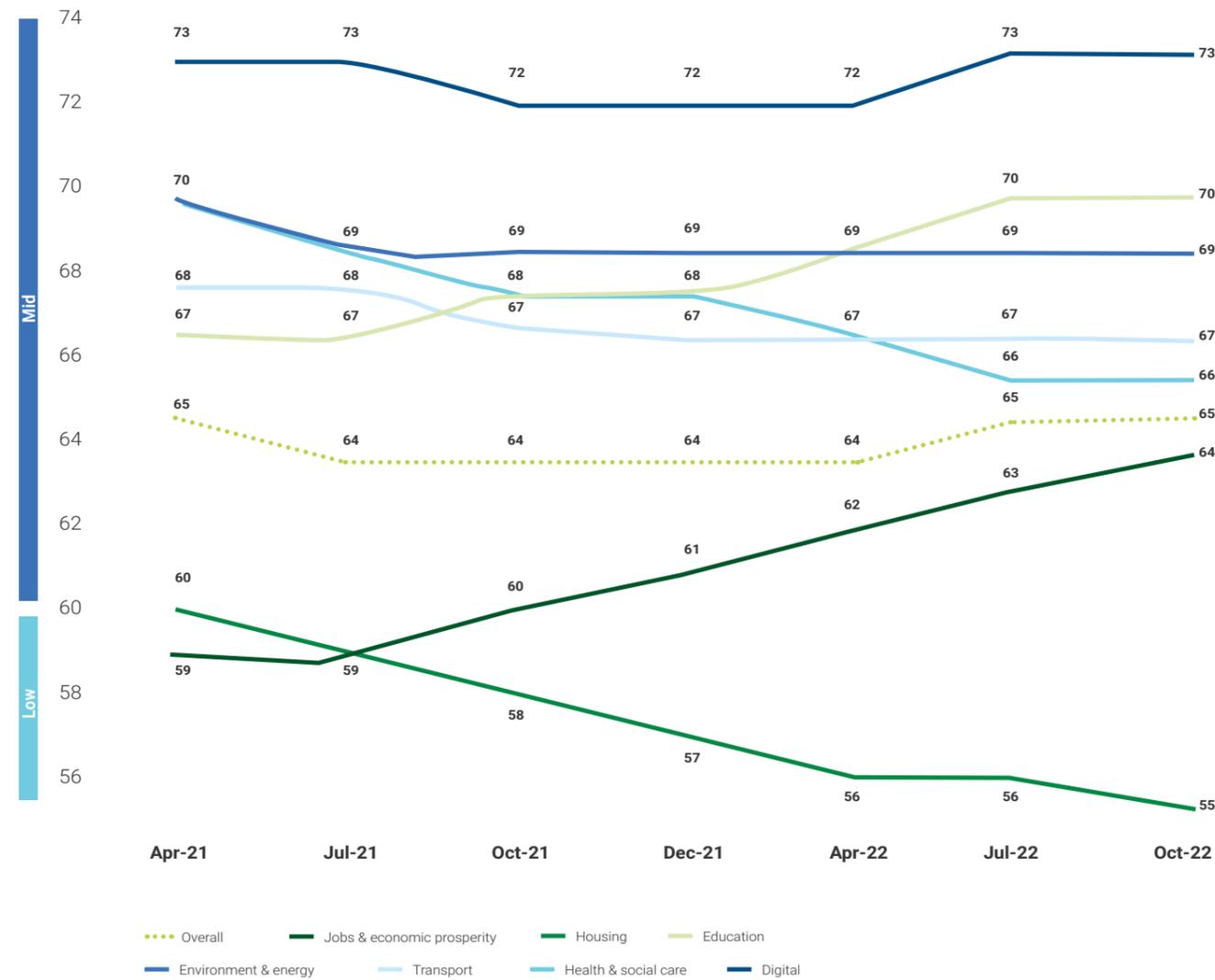
Provided that this guiding principle of equal opportunity across the whole of the UK remains the same, whatever guise Levelling-Up 2.0 takes from this point on, there are a number of crucial learnings and recommendations apparent through our research that we would offer as a blueprint to better ensure meaningful movement towards achieving these objectives.

Therefore, this latest edition of the RBI not only outlines the continuing scale of the challenge facing the UK, but is very much intended to act as a blueprint to help the new Government navigate the issue over the coming years to ensure that what action it takes can have the maximum positive impact where and how it is most needed. The recommendations form a self-fulfilling virtuous cycle, where investment in economic infrastructure will positively effect health outcomes, while improving health outcomes will, in turn, positively effect economic output.



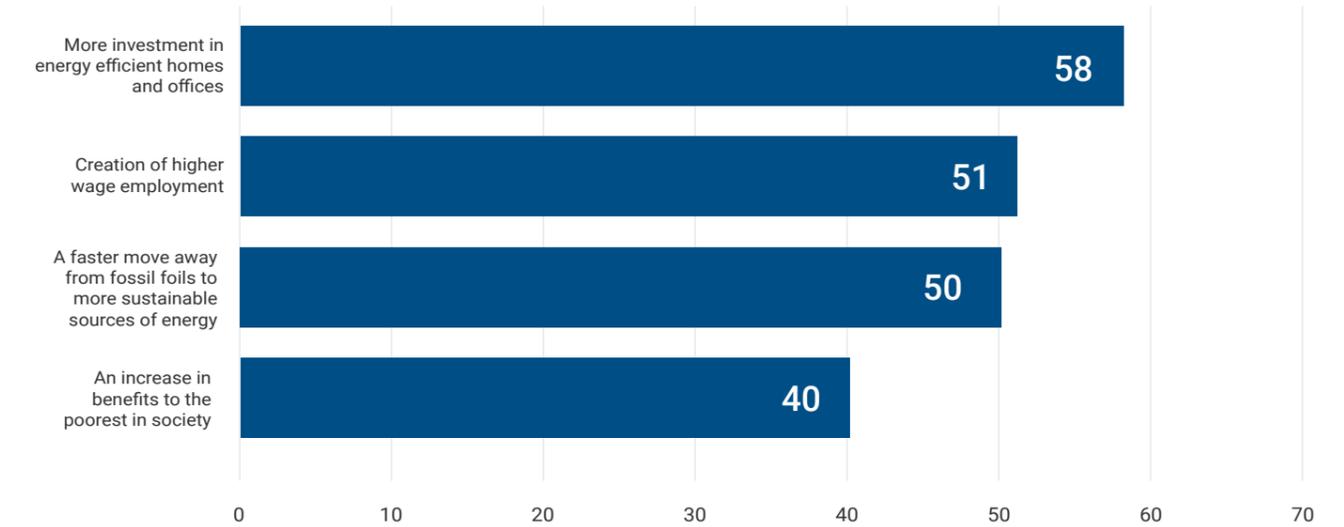
Executive summary (RBI)

RBI performance over time



- **Recommendation 1:** Real transformation requires joined-up system thinking with better devolution of decision-making
- **Recommendation 2:** We need to focus on the skills and opportunities that support high-wage, high-value employment
- **Recommendation 3:** There needs to be a greater focus on housebuilding
- **Recommendation 4:** There is a need for equal opportunity in rebuilding greener
- **Recommendation 5:** ES(H)G – the importance of public health needs to be made more explicit

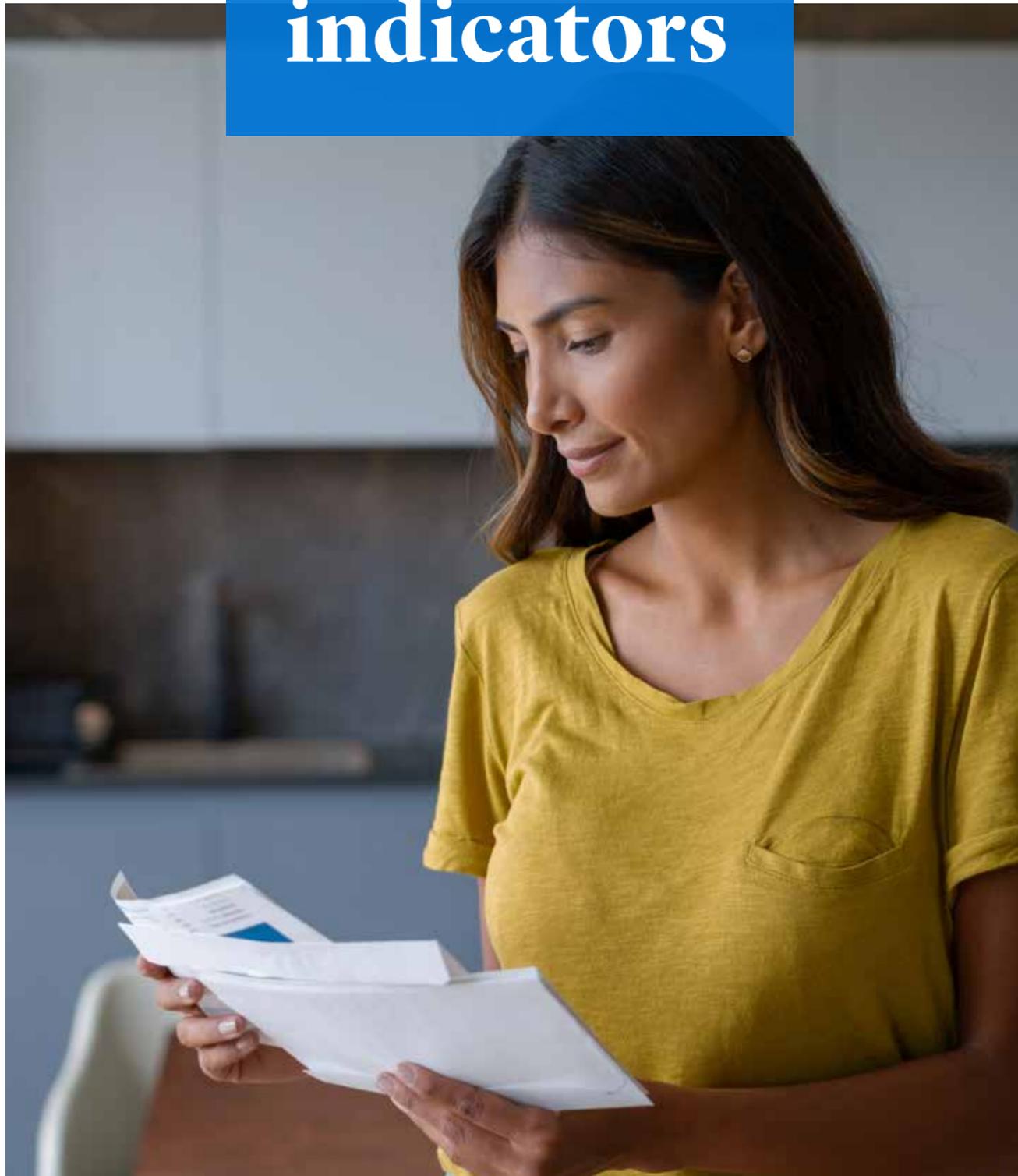
Levels of support for potential solutions to the current cost-of-living crisis (% stating attractive / very attractive)



Component index scores by UK country and region

	North-East of England	North-West of England	Yorkshire & Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East of England	South-East England	South-West England	London	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Overall RBI score	65	65	64	64	64	64	65	63	68	63	65	64
Health index	62	63	63	64	63	68	69	69	73	61	62	63
Education index	69	69	67	67	67	68	71	73	75	65	73	63
Housing index	63	60	59	59	59	52	48	45	50	57	61	61
Jobs & economic prosperity index	58	61	61	61	58	66	69	63	72	58	63	60
Energy & environment index	69	68	69	69	67	70	69	71	67	70	69	69
Transport index	68	68	66	66	68	65	67	64	74	65	66	65
Digital index	74	75	76	74	74	71	74	68	78	71	71	67

RBI key indicators



The song remains the same

Over the previous quarter of 2022 all eyes have been on the cost-of-living crisis, and none more fixedly than on the cost-of-energy. As we have already seen with the support package announced by the new Prime Minister, only one day into her tenure, addressing the rapidly increasing cost of energy is a key priority.

And while that list of priorities is already extending far beyond solely the energy challenges facing the UK, the latest findings from the L&G Rebuilding Britain Index (RBI) demonstrate that we can ill-afford to de-prioritise efforts to level up the existing and, in some cases, widening inequalities that the UK continues to experience.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the UK's approach to Levelling-Up will or should look the same. As we head into a period where the headwinds continue to grow ever stronger, it becomes all the more vital that our efforts to level up are targeted, efficient and impactful. Since the inception of the RBI there are a number of lessons and key findings that can help guide how the UK takes Levelling-Up forwards.

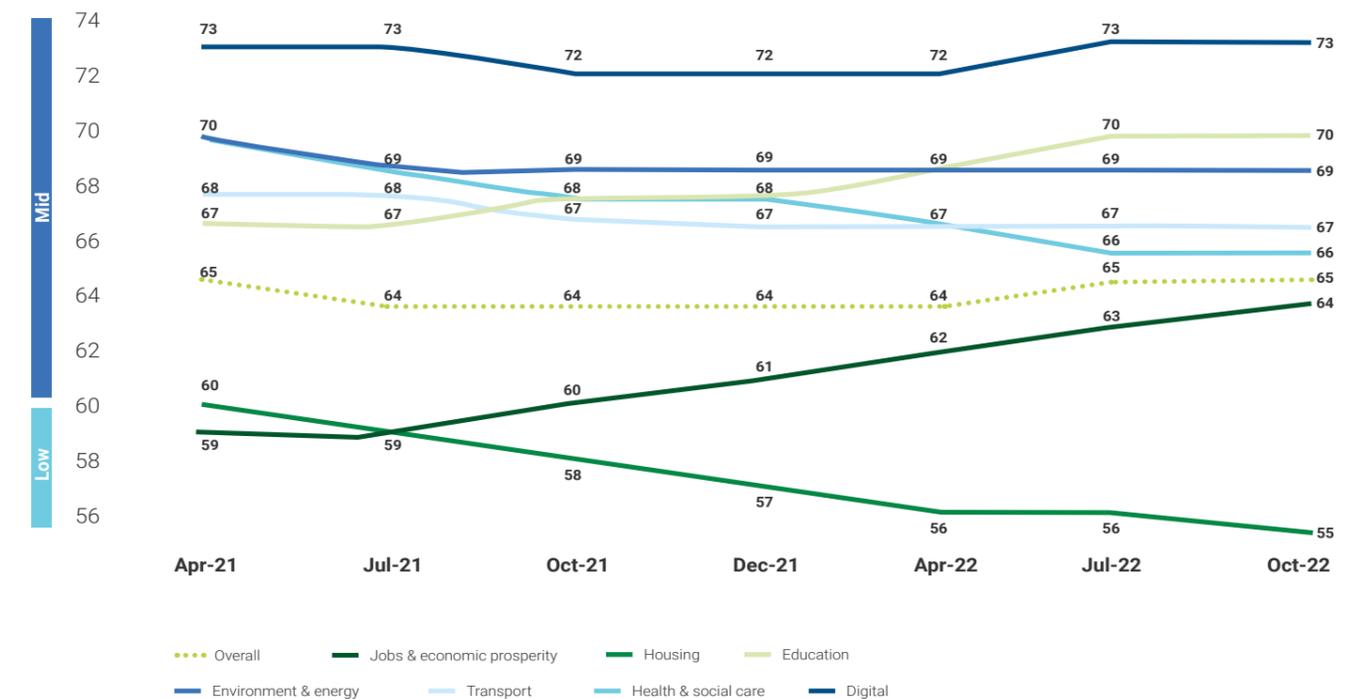
Before we explore those lessons in greater detail it is first necessary to outline the current state of play. The latest quarter has seen the overall UK RBI score increase by one-point to a total of 65/100. This is driven by the continued

improvement of the Jobs & Economic Prosperity measure (64/100) – which, as outlined within the methodology in the appendix to this report, is upweighted to have a greater influence on the overall RBI score given its strength of relationship with perceived quality of life.

This improvement is, in itself, driven solely by continued improvements to the unemployment claimant count measure (+9 points over the previous quarter). While improvement of this nature is, of course, a positive trend, it should be noted that we are not seeing similar positive moves in relation to average earnings or GDP per capita. Given household sentiment is also flatlining on factors around jobs and prosperity, we must continue to ask questions as to whether the jobs being created are the higher wage and value jobs required to support both regional economies and the households within them.

Similarly, we have also seen a minor improvement in the UK-level Education measure (70/100), which is being driven by improvements in the proportion of the UK population with no NVQ qualifications. Given the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on how students are assessed and on examination results this is perhaps of no surprise. As schools and colleges return to pre-pandemic norms it will be interesting to track how these number change.

Figure 1. Despite no change in GDP per capita or average earnings, improvements in unemployment continue to drive improvement in the Jobs & Economic Prosperity measure



Conversely, both Housing and Health & Social Care measures continue to decline.

Housing has seen declines in perceived availability of both starter homes and rental properties as well as a continued decline in the score for house prices as a proportion of average income. Given the recent jolt experienced in the housing market as a result of rising interest rates, it will be interesting to assess what happens next with regards to house prices and what impact this has, if any, on the perceived availability of supply.

Finally, the decline in the Health measure reflects a fall in sentiment towards local access to high quality primary and secondary care services. However, given we live in a country where the accepted truth is that people are continuing to live for longer, it is perhaps most concerning to see a decline in life expectancy. While the fall-out from the Covid-19 pandemic will still be a factor, the data shows that the challenges that we continue to face with regards to the supply of health care in the UK is beginning to show in perhaps the most telling health metric of them all. It is a warning we cannot afford to ignore.

Regional and local index performance

As can be seen in figure 3 there are often very wide disparities in the overall RBI score at a local authority level. Every local community within a given region has its own strengths and challenges which can be explored in granular detail using our interactive mapping tool. The tool pinpoints the extent to which each local authority is pulling ahead and falling behind across each of the individual 52 metrics captured within the RBI.

As highlighted in our previous reports, while differences in RBI performance across the index also exist at a regional level, they remain far less pronounced than they are felt locally (figure 2).

While the Jobs & Economic Prosperity index score has now risen for the fifth consecutive quarter, the regional trends show that this has been broadly consistent across the whole of the UK – meaning that the regional differences on this measure remain unaddressed.

Figure 2. Component index scores and change over the previous quarter by UK country and region

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¹ Rebuilding Britain Index (RBI) | Legal & General (legalandgeneral.com)

The inverse is also true in relation to the Housing index score, which has again declined. This decline has largely been felt across the whole of the UK – and, indeed, most acutely in the South-West of England where Housing scores were already at a UK low.

Addressing the cost-of-living crisis can also mean addressing levelling-up

If levelling-up the UK was not difficult enough on its own, the cost-of-living crisis that we are currently living through adds an unwanted layer of complexity in how action is prioritised.

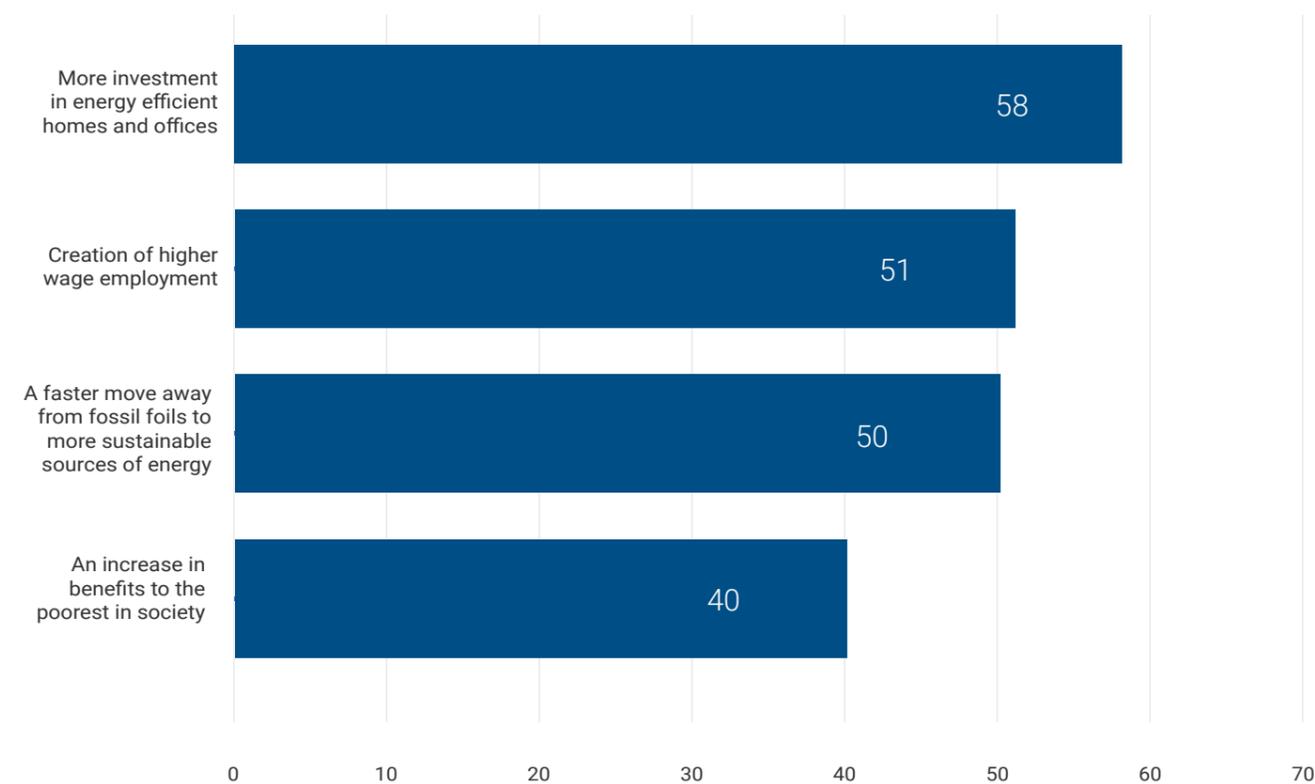
While support packages around the cost of energy have garnered the headlines, it is increasingly vital that efforts

to level-up the UK are not placed on the back-burner, particularly given how the current crisis is already widening some the inequalities that the policy looks to address. Households recognise that support packages are necessary for many, but data shows that people are more supportive of structural efforts that attempt to address root causes of the problem. Recent research shows that Levelling-Up is the most popular existing government policy among the UK electorate – making it more popular than Net Zero, Brexit and Private Renters Reform.

Our own survey data supports this conclusion. When asked to indicate their level of support for potential solutions to the cost-of-living crisis, support was significantly higher for solutions that looked to address the root causes, including ensuring more energy efficient homes and offices and the creation of higher wage employment, than for any increase in state benefits.

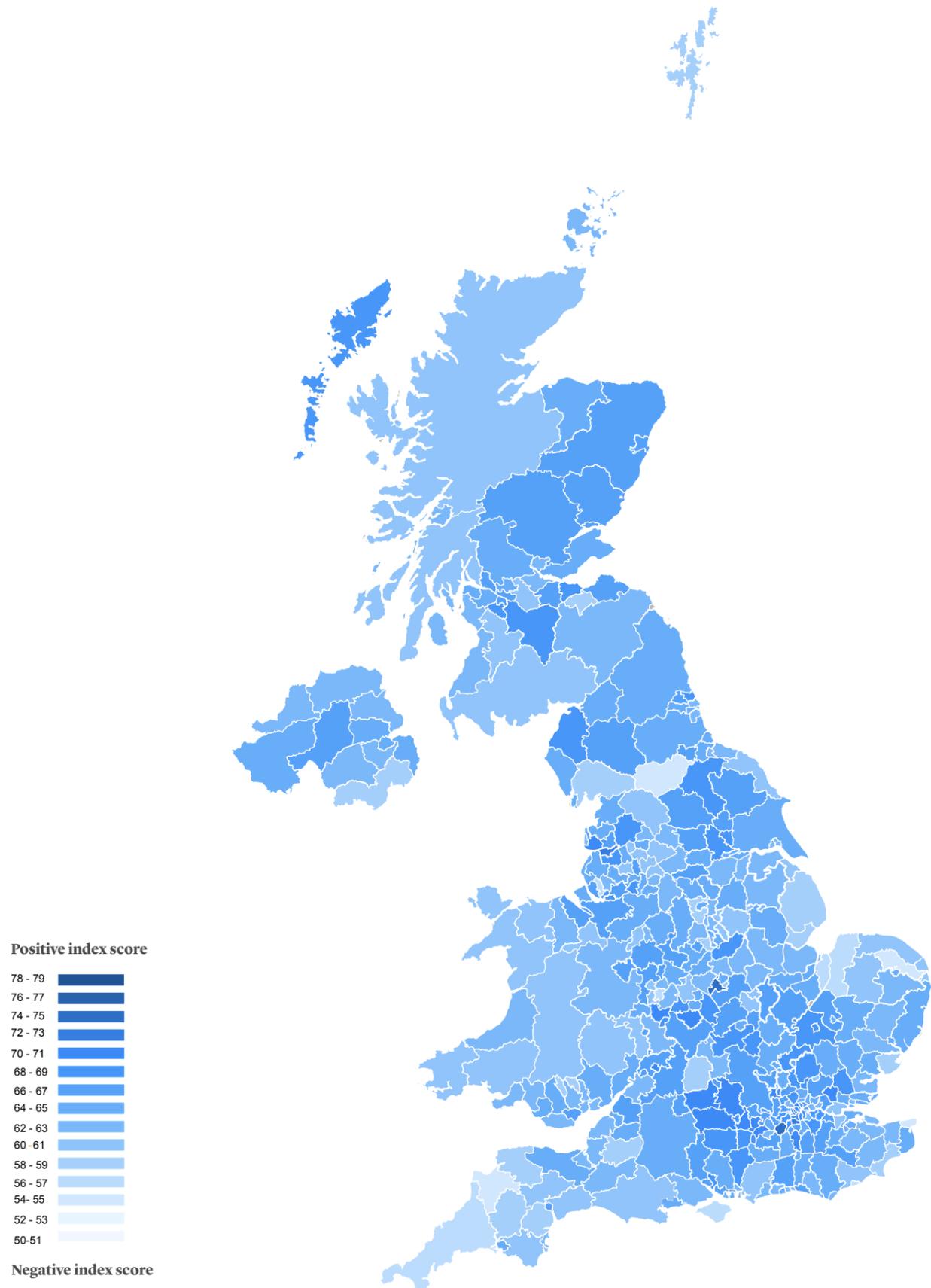
Households recognise the need for a long-term structural re-think in our approach to housing, local economies and energy supply – and for government-led strategic thinking to be put into action quickly.

Figure 4. Levels of support for potential solutions to the current cost-of-living crisis (% stating attractive / very attractive)



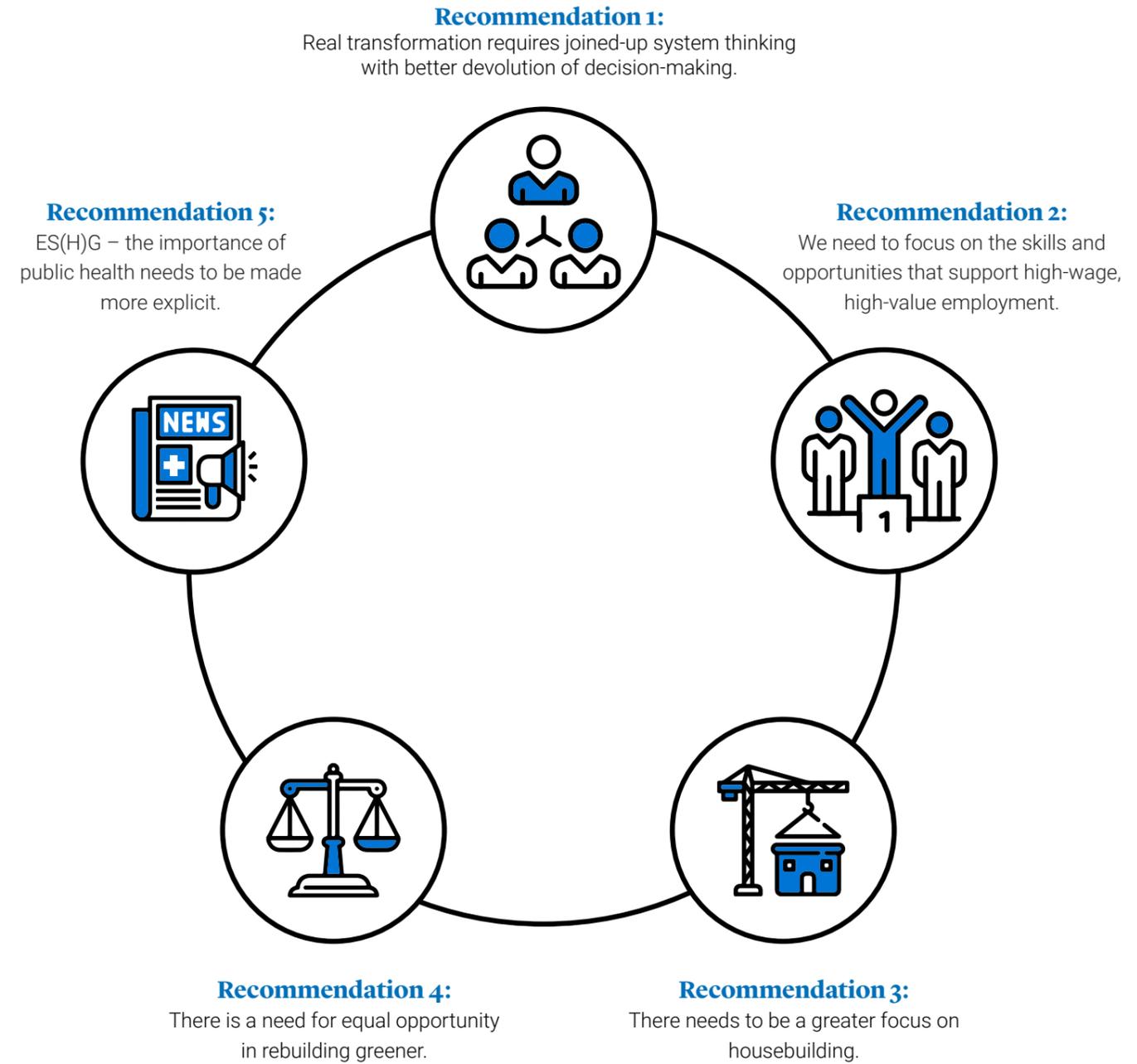
² UK Onward, Voters won't forgive the next prime minister if they ignore the idea of 'levelling up', August 2022

Figure 3. Overall RBI score by local authority



Since the start of 2021 Legal & General (L&G), through the Rebuilding Britain Index (RBI), has collected thousands of data points and has captured sentiment from 35,000 UK households. The findings have been concerning and consistent: the social and geographic inequalities that the UK has been looking to address, appear as vast as ever – and in some cases appear to be widening further, not helped by the current cost-of-living crisis.

Provided that this guiding principle of equal opportunity across the whole of the UK remains the same, whatever guise Levelling-Up 2.0 takes from this point on, there are a number of crucial learnings and recommendations apparent through our research that we would offer as a blueprint to better ensure meaningful movement towards achieving these objectives.



The following sections of the report outline each of these in detail.

Let's change the record

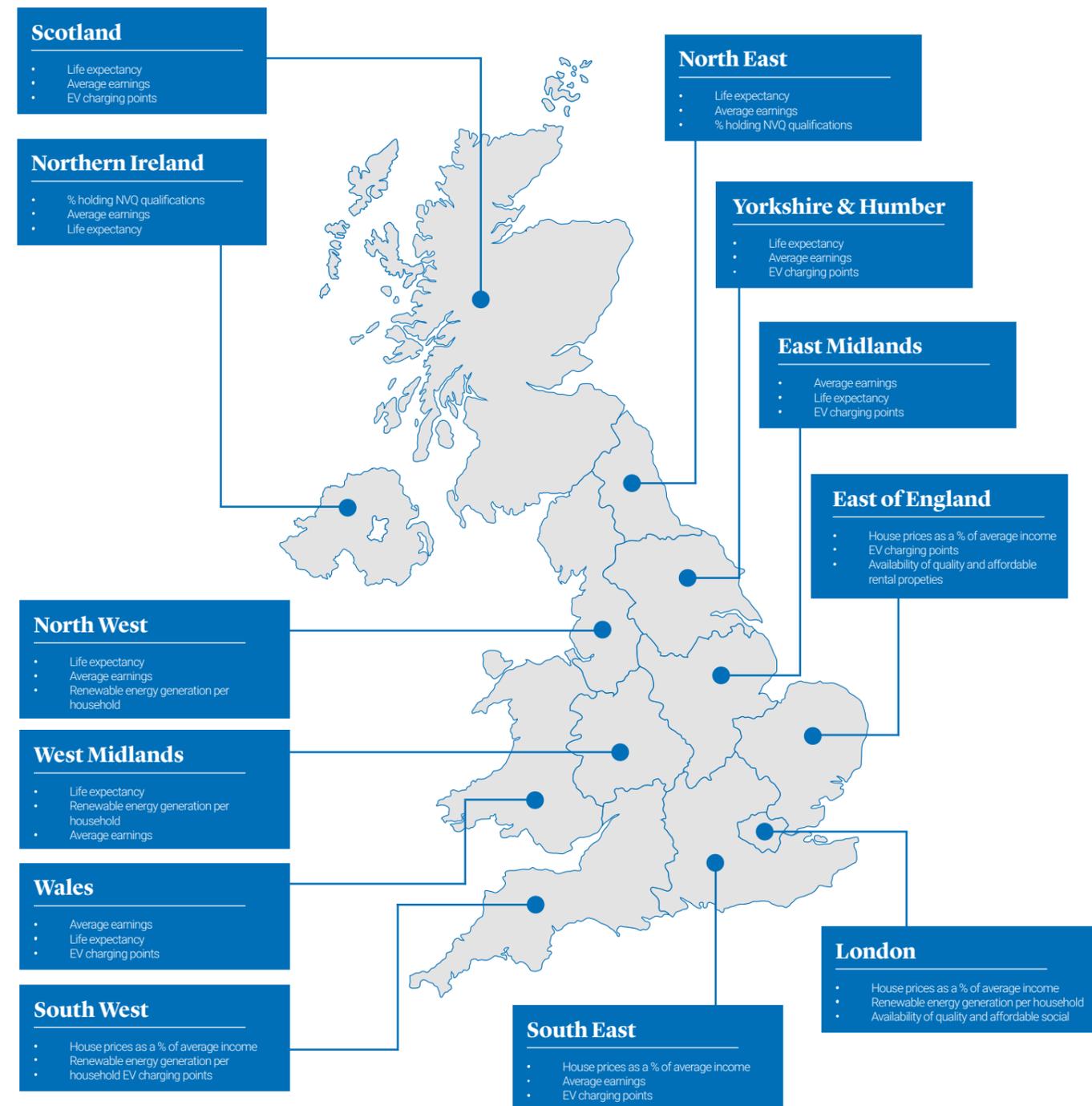


Recommendation 1: Real transformation requires joined-up system thinking with better devolution of decision-making

As demonstrated in figure 5, priorities should not necessarily be the same across the whole of the UK. London and the South of England remain hampered by the housing market – in particular, house prices and availability of affordable housing stock – and performance over the last year has done nothing to address that issue.

For the North of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Jobs & Economic Prosperity and Health remain the key areas of disparity. Specific disparities include life expectancy, average earnings, unemployment, and GDP. Again, there is no evidence of these gaps narrowing over the past year.

Figure 5. Significant underperformance on RBI measures as compared to the UK average



Ultimately, while it will be important for central government to provide an overarching strategic framework for deciding national priorities, regional and local strategies will need to be developed that better reflect and respond to local need.

In terms of prioritising where we focus efforts to level up, we really do have to think local. Our data demonstrates the widening of disparities once you move from the regional to

the local level. The variations in RBI scores at the regional level are relatively consistent with a narrow range of five points, London ranking highest on 68, with Wales and the South-East of England lowest on 63. However, at the local level, we witness a range of 21 points with Kensington & Chelsea scoring highest on 75 and Torridge ranking lowest on 54.

Figure 6. Top 10 and bottom 10 RBI local authority scores

Top-performing local authorities		Bottom-performing local authorities	
Kensington and Chelsea	75	Erewash	58
Elmbridge	74	Sandwell	57
Merton	73	Cornwall	57
Hammersmith and Fulham	72	Isle of Wight	57
Brentwood	71	South Lakeland	57
South Oxfordshire	71	Thanet	57
Reigate and Banstead	71	Hastings	57
Wokingham	71	Knowsley	56
Cheltenham	71	King's Lynn and West Norfolk	56
Camden	71	Torridge	54

This demonstrates that the more locally driven the analysis, the more likely we are to identify pockets in which left-behind communities are present, and the easier it becomes to identify the targeted investment priorities required to make the greatest impact in levelling up. For example, whilst the South-East of England as a region performs well, and is often overlooked when discussing Levelling Up, our research shows that some of the worst performing areas in the UK are all located in the region.

While this is the case, we cannot ignore the fact that system-thinking will be required to enact real transformation. The UK economy, health system, education system, housing and environment, for example, do not operate in isolation and there is a significant level of interdependency between them. As such, while the process of setting local spending priorities cannot be managed

from Whitehall, as part of a top-down approach, this shift to localism will still require central government to provide a national framework for deciding national priorities and for ensuring a fair balance between national and regional funding priorities. It also needs to ensure that we close any regional disparities in public funding of capital expenditure across the UK.

Local decision-making cannot result in many individual and completely independent decisions taking place that fail to account for the fact that they are all working to address issues within the same system. To a greater or lesser extent, the outcomes of all activity will be felt beyond that local area.

Recommendation 2: We need to focus on the skills and opportunities that support high-wage, high-value employment.

From the inception of the RBI the data has been clear in how fundamental Jobs and Economic Prosperity measures are in driving both positive scores in the outcomes metrics included within the index and in influencing household sentiment. This is why these measures have greater weight within the overall RBI score.

Our data shows clearly that those achieving higher scores across Jobs & Economic Prosperity also outperform across all other aspects of the index – from Health & Social Care scores to Digital Access scores. Ultimately, a thriving and growing economy can and will have a drip-feed impact on wider issues that fall within the focus of Levelling-Up.

Figure 7. Relationship between jobs & economic prosperity and the wider RBI measures – average index scores by JEP score

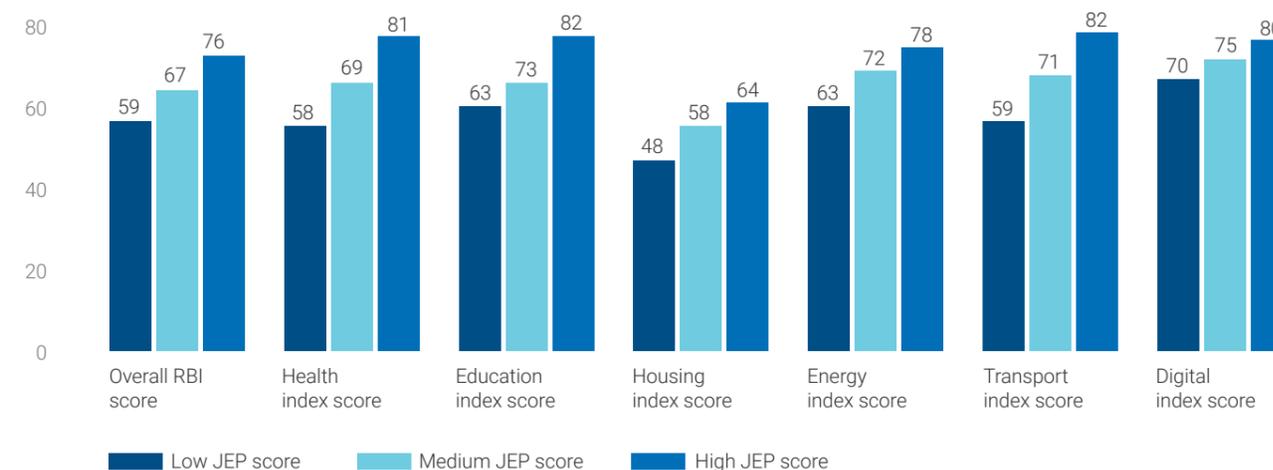
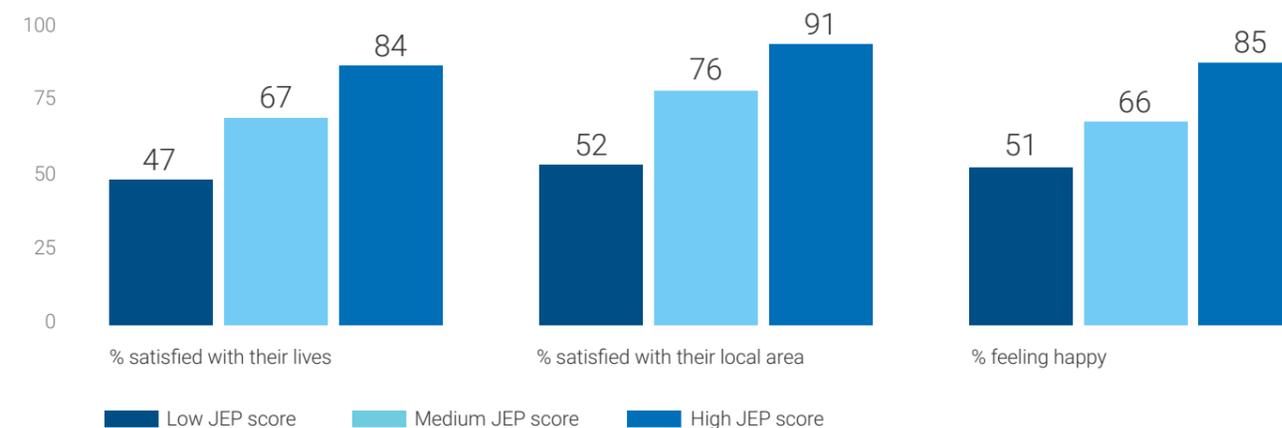


Figure 8. Relationship between jobs & economic prosperity life satisfaction, place satisfaction and happiness



Similarly, there is a strong relationship between Jobs & Economic Prosperity and our sense of happiness, life satisfaction and satisfaction with our local area as a place to live.

As such, while each local area will have its specific needs, there is an argument to say that jobs and the economy should always be factored into activity that aims to level-up left-behind communities, regardless of where across the UK they are found.

Elsewhere, trend analysis across key jobs and economy measures show that more focus is required on delivering higher wage and higher value employment opportunities. While the headline improvement in the Jobs & Economic Prosperity Index measure is positive, it is clear that

this improvement has been driven by the significant improvements we have seen across the UK in terms of unemployment rates – which, post-Covid, now sit at the lowest levels the UK has seen since the 1970's. While this is the case, other key measures – including average earnings and GDP per capita – have not shown the same trend. Indeed, from a GDP perspective, only London and, to a lesser extent, Northern Ireland have experienced any improvement. Other regions have declined over this period, suggesting that some regional economies may have been in a recession for some time already and clearly demonstrates that the gaps between the best and worst performing parts of the UK have widened on this measure. It is a similar story both with average earnings and the perceived availability of well-paid employment.

Figure 9. Change in unemployment index scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)

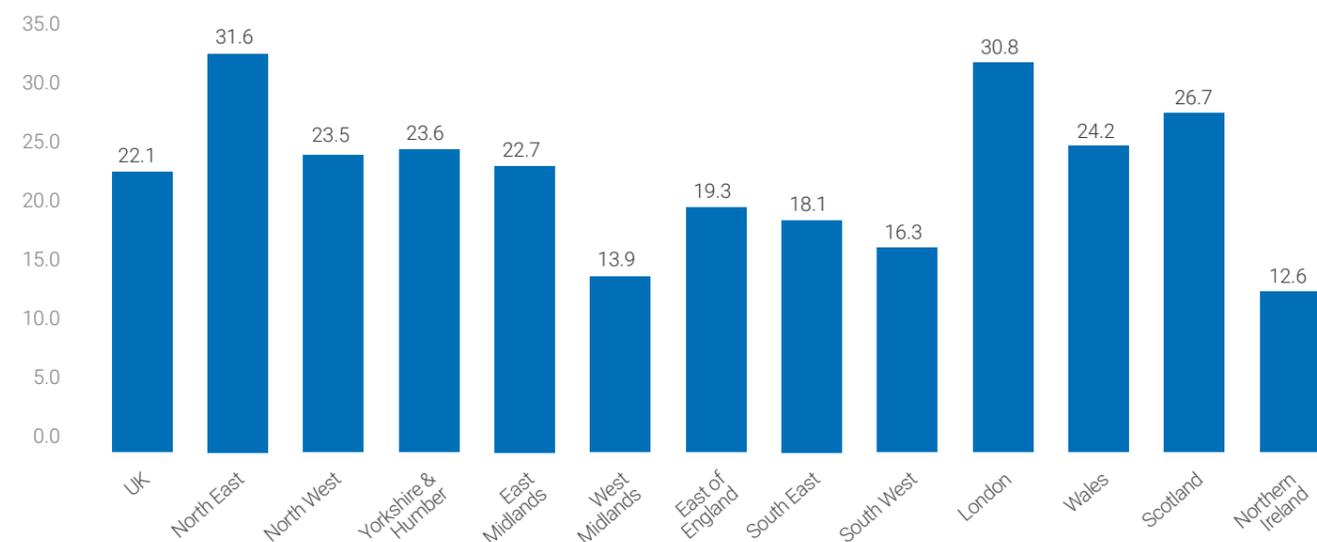


Figure 10. Change in GDP per capita index scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)

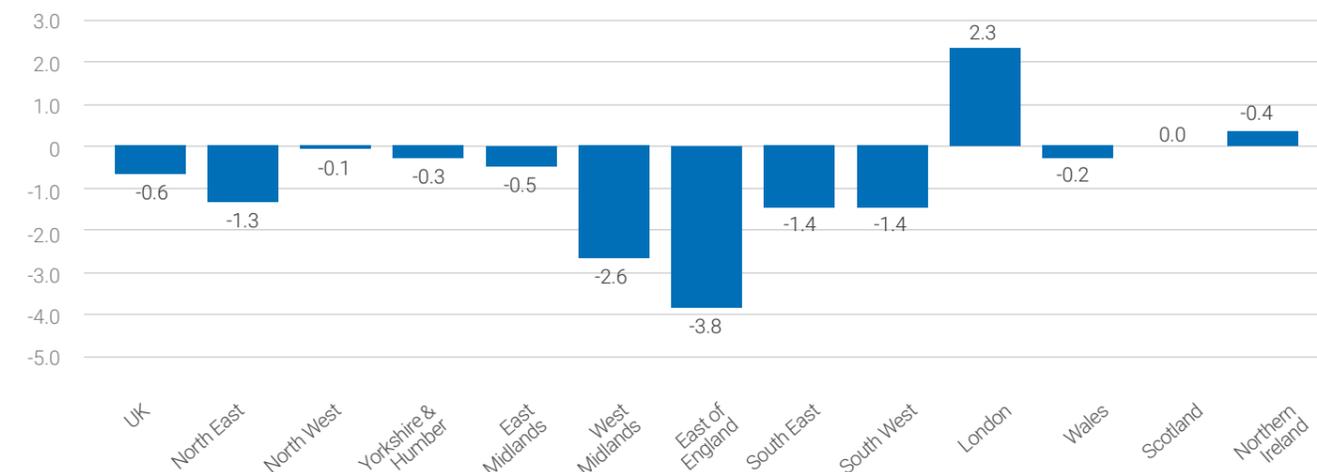


Figure 11. Change in average earnings index scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)

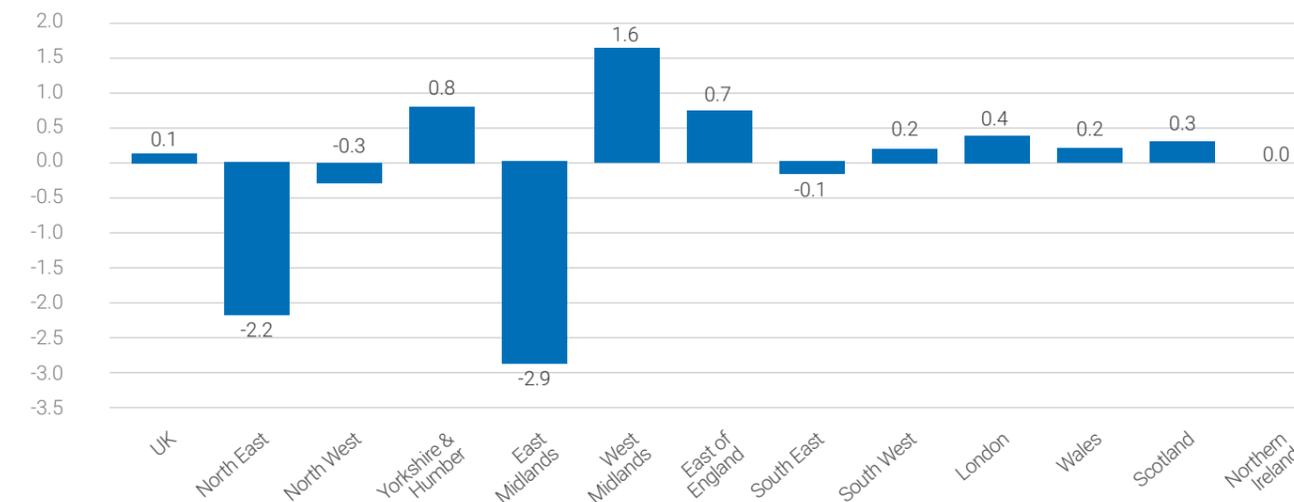
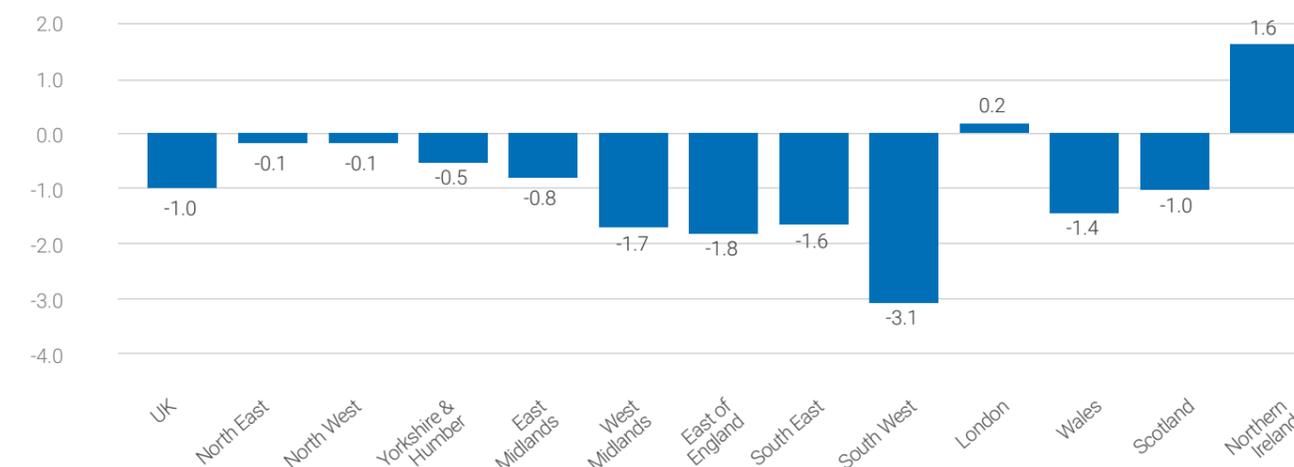


Figure 12. Change in perceived availability of well-paid jobs index scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)



Clearly, all employment is positive, but there needs to be a real focus on high wage and high value employment across all parts of the UK if we are to better ensure that these existing inequalities can be addressed.

The creation Investment Zones across up to 38 MCA's or UTLA's, in which a range of tax, regulatory flexibility and planning simplification will encourage developments to drive economic growth and delivery of residential housing, is a positive step in the right direction.

As we know from the local and regional level performance across Jobs and the Economy, not all of these 38 zones will

be starting from the same baseline. For example, Blackpool achieves a JEP score of only 46/100 and Stoke-on-Trent a score of 51/100, while Greater London achieves a score of 72/100 and Cheshire West and Chester a score of 71/100. As previously stated, this is likely to mean different needs in different authorities and this reiterates the need for empowered decision makers able to make the right planning decisions for any given local area at the speed that can match the Governments ambition to start delivering now.

Recommendation 3: There need to be a greater focus on housebuilding

Jobs and housing both account for a greater weighting within the overall RBI score. As our analysis shows, there is a greater strength of relationship between these factors and the extent to which we feel quality of life locally is improving or declining. However, despite their importance, both Housing and Jobs are the areas of the index that perform most poorly.

The need to invest in our nation's housing stock, be that social, rented or private, is an area which predates the current economic difficulties. Notwithstanding the fact that the UK has undergone major population growth since 2000,

the volume of new homes built in the UK peaked during the 1960s. These housing pressures are, according to our Index, greatest where affordability is most scarce such as in the South-West, London and the South East.

However, rather than addressing these issues, key RBI housing metrics have shown not insignificant levels of decline over the previous year. Concerningly, these scores are declining most severely within the South-West of England, which is already the lowest scoring region in the UK on this issue.

Figure 13. Change in overall housing index scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)

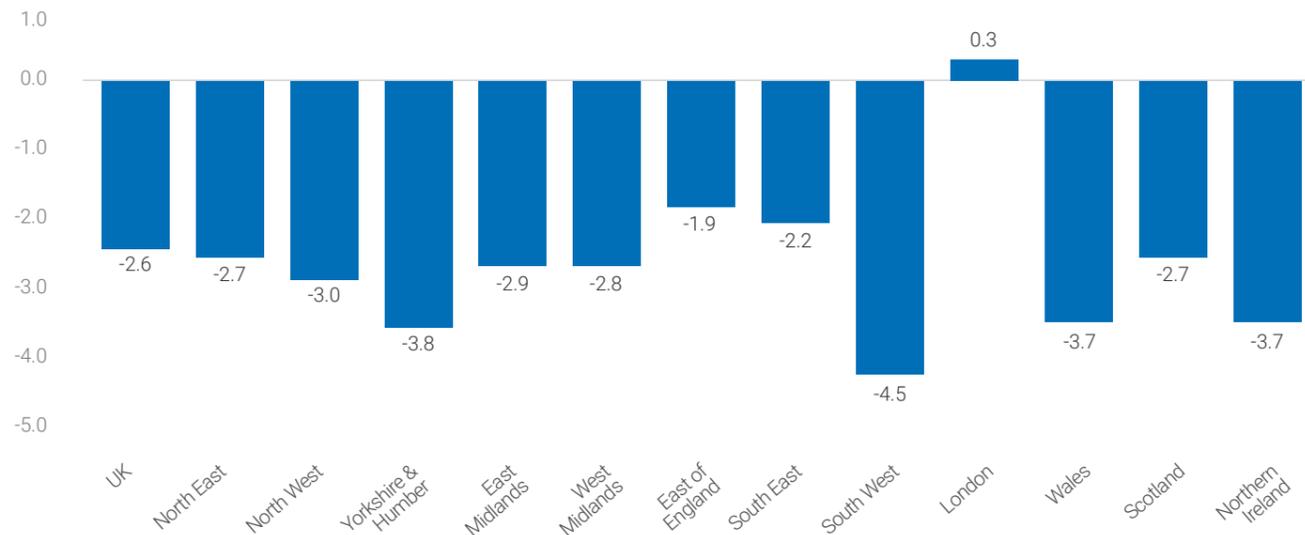


Figure 14. Change in house prices as a % of income scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)

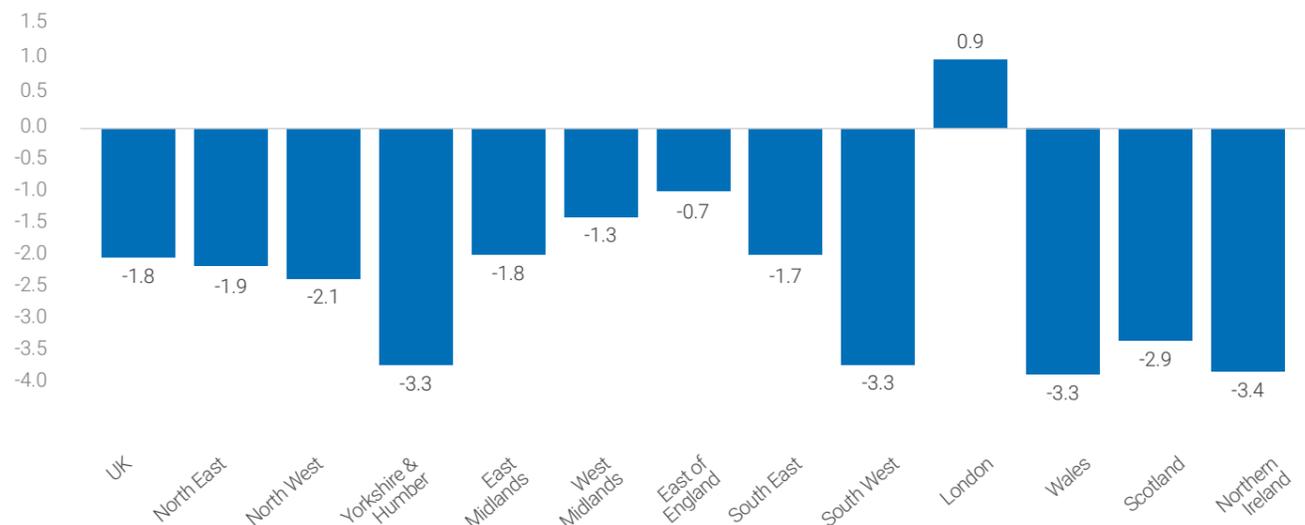
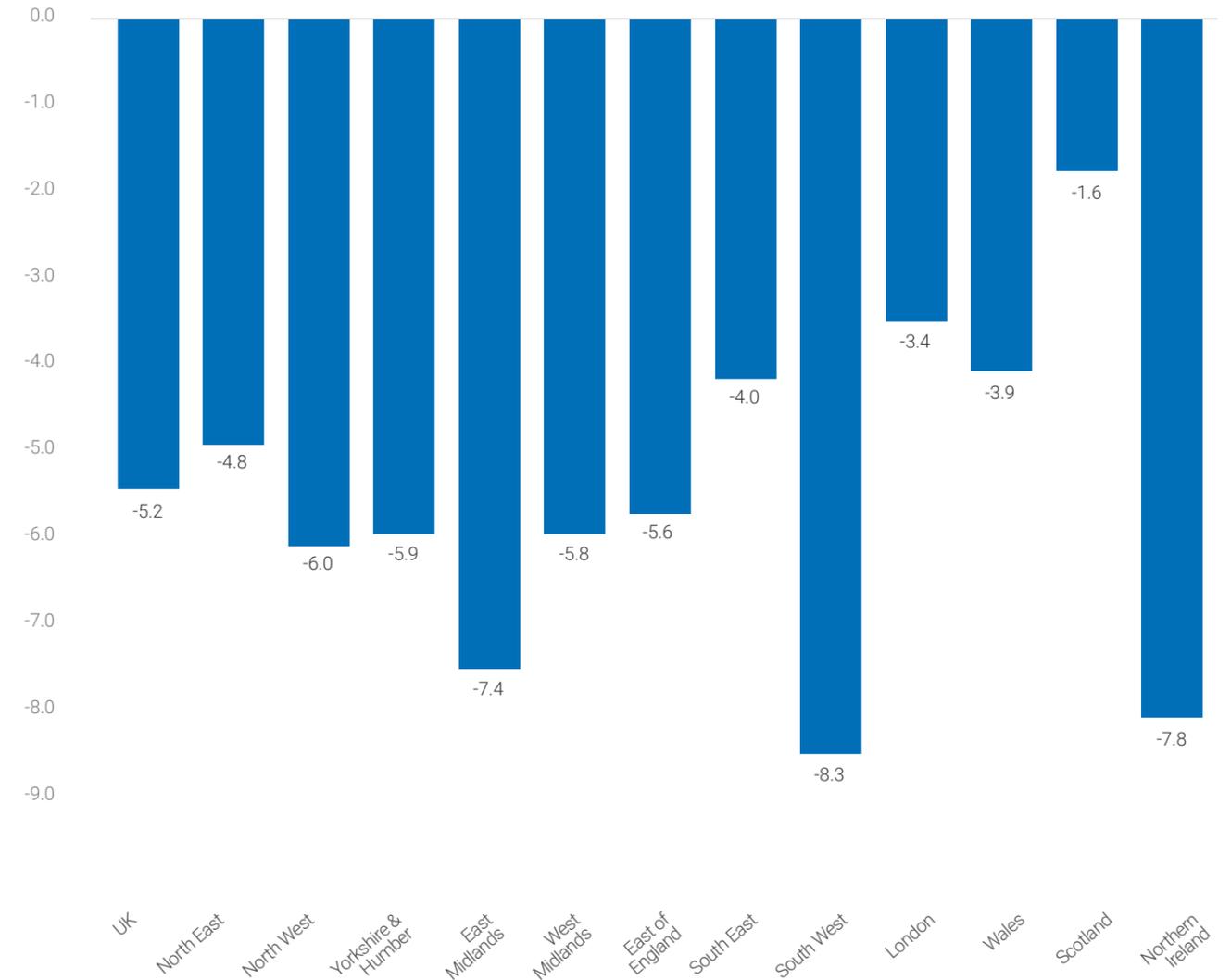


Figure 15. Change in extent to which local housing meets local needs scores by region (Q4 2021 – Q3 2022)



Whilst largescale national 'mega-projects', such as High Speed 2 or Hinckley Point nuclear power plant, take up large amounts of capital, it seems that investments which are closer to home, such as house building, will have the most rapid impact in improving the UK's overall RBI score. How we determine those investment needs should also have a regional and local dimension.

prosperity. Those areas of the UK with greater output and higher earnings typically have a poorer supply of affordable housing. Addressing housing alongside efforts to boost these local economies will be a vital part of avoiding the law of unintended consequences, ensuring a better supply of labour and negative impacting existing local communities.

Therefore, the focus placed on house-building within the UK Government Investment Zone plans should be welcomed. It is little secret that there is a strong negative correlation between housing availability and affordability and economic

Recommendation 4: There is a need for equal opportunity in rebuilding greener

Levelling-Up and "Building Back Greener" should go hand-in-hand.

Take the challenge of retrofitting UK homes with more sustainable technologies. It is estimated that the UK's retrofit industry must grow 10-fold to address 23% of UK emissions. At this point in time the sector is mostly made up of SMEs and there is an estimated £360 billion investment gap to decarbonise the UK's building stock.

This comes against the backdrop and vast costs of grand infrastructure projects, such as HS2. While the issuance of green bonds by the UK government is a promising sign, green sovereign debt is nascent in the UK. If swift action is to be taken to address the green infrastructure needs of households to face-up to the climate change challenge, collaboration of public and private finance is vital.

As such, Building Back Better and Levelling-Up require local investment in green infrastructure. We cannot build healthy and prosperous communities without building and retrofitting infrastructure which reduces emissions, improves air quality and access to green jobs.

However, RBI data shows that the UK runs the risk of creating two visions of Britain: one where more affluent communities benefit from the green and clean technologies of the 21st century, and another where less affluent communities are saddled with polluting technologies from the 20th century.

An example is in the findings for EV ownership and good access to EV charging infrastructure. Only 5% of UK households with an income of less than £20,000 per year own an EV, with this proportion increasingly significantly with household income. The story is the same for those stating that they have good or excellent access to EV charging infrastructure – from only 15% of households earning less than £20,000 per year up to over half among those earning £100,000 or more.

Figure 16. EV ownership and perceived good access to EV charging points by household income

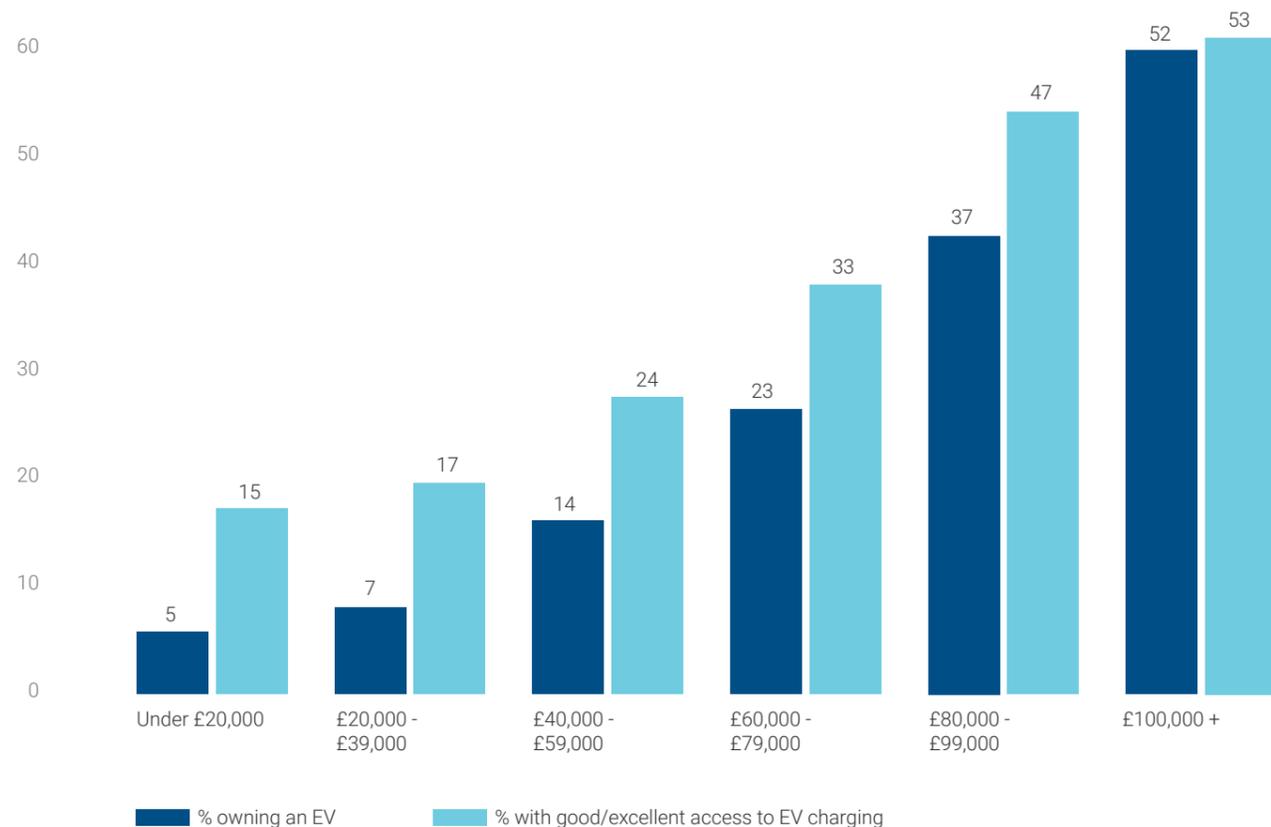
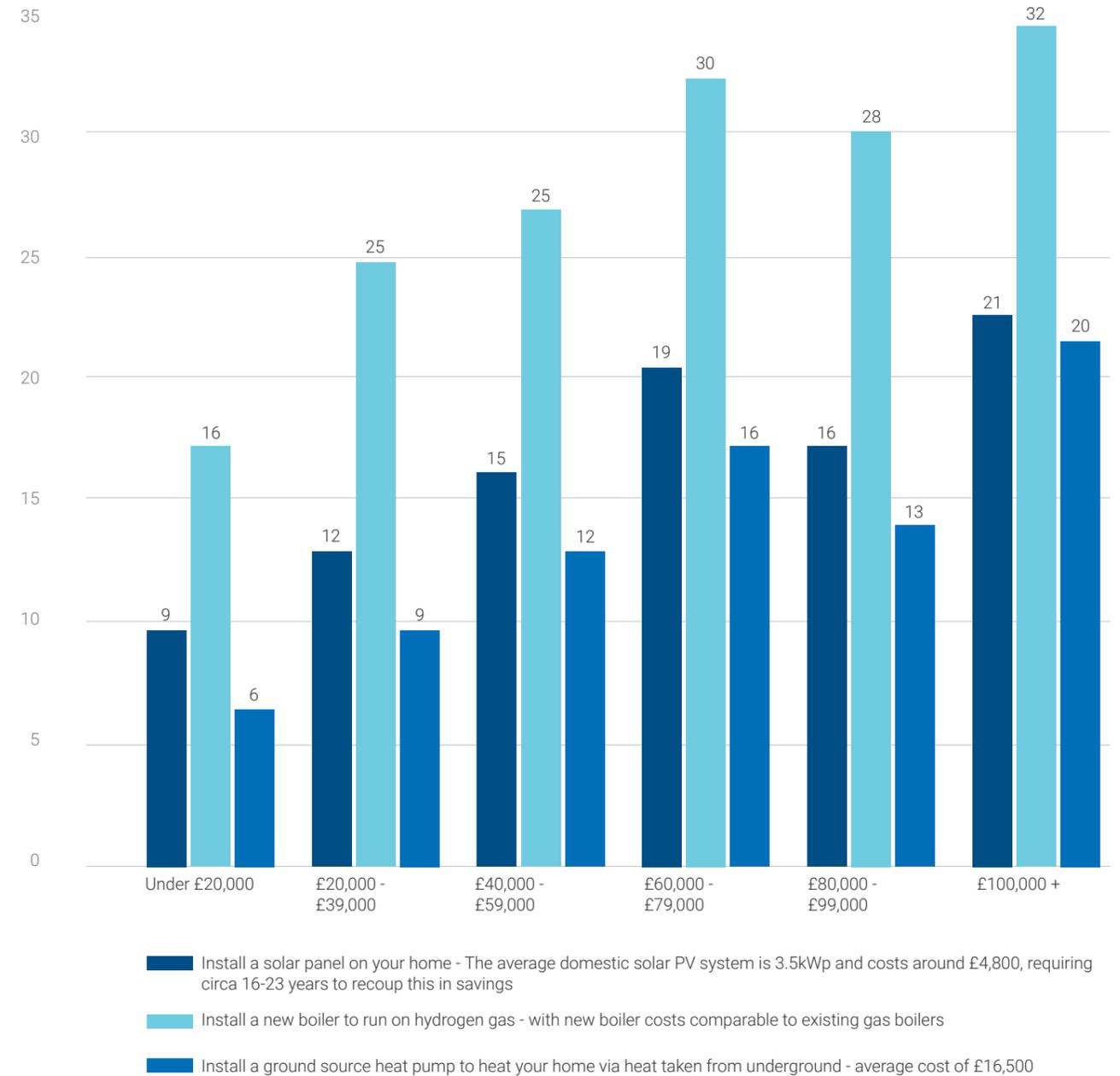


Figure 17. Mean average % of cost households are willing to contribute for green technology by household income



Similarly, while many of the home modifications that will facilitate the 'greening' of households, such as installation of renewable energy sources, are attractive to all households, cost remains a significant barrier for many. RBI survey data demonstrates clearly that households with a lower income are less willing or able to contribute towards the inevitable costs of technologies, such as solar panels, hydrogen boilers or heat pumps.

It is vital that as we as a nation move towards Net Zero 2050, communities of all levels of affluence move at the

same pace. Climate transition cannot be restricted to the better off. If the UK is to successfully hit its carbon neutral target by 2050, this transition needs to take place in a socially inclusive manner.

To ensure this outcome, central government has a major role to play in facilitating local government and households to adapt local infrastructure to address sustainability and climate concerns.

³ GFC, UK retrofit industry must grow 10X to address 23% of UK emissions, 21 September 2021

Recommendation 5: ES(H)G – the importance of public health needs to be made more explicit

Public health may well be implicit within the social aspect of ESG. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that implicit is not enough. Often, social factors are trickier to measure from an ESG perspective. However, health is something that is certainly measurable. Indeed, the RBI and some of the specific health metrics it includes, demonstrate that Health should be placed at the top table in terms of priorities if we are to really deliver on the form of inclusive capital that L&G aim to deliver. In short, the focus needs to be on people as much as it is on finance capital.

And our index is showing that, as opposed to making progress towards “improving life expectancy by five-years by 2035” as per one of the 12 core missions of the Levelling-Up White Paper, the situation is continuing to decline (refer to figure 1).

The recent context for life expectancy and, arguably more importantly, healthy life expectancy, has not been positive. After witnessing decades of improvements – resulting from improved diet and lifestyle, advances in medical science, and increased affluence – the UK has been among a small number of industrialised nations which have seen life expectancy improvements stall over the previous decade. Indeed, the RBI measure of life expectancy has declined

over the last 12-months down to only 43/100 as a UK average.

What we know from the RBI is that economic activity can and will have a significant impact on health outcomes – and that improving health outcomes can, in turn, increase economic output by reducing absenteeism and better ensuring people live longer, healthier and more productive lives. Failing to address the issue will result in those more affluent areas benefiting more greatly and only widening the economic divide. A more inclusive and democratic approach to health needs to be a priority.

Our findings show that those scoring highly on the RBI are significantly more likely to report that they are in good or excellent health (81%) in comparison to those achieving a medium (63%) or low (48%) RBI score.

Indeed, as can be seen in figure 19, those that self-report their own health as very good, score significantly higher across all aspects of the index than those who feel that they are in poor health. This is most acute in respect to housing and transport scores, where those in very good health score an average of 16-points higher than those in very poor health.

Figure 18. % of people reporting “good/excellent” health by overall RBI score

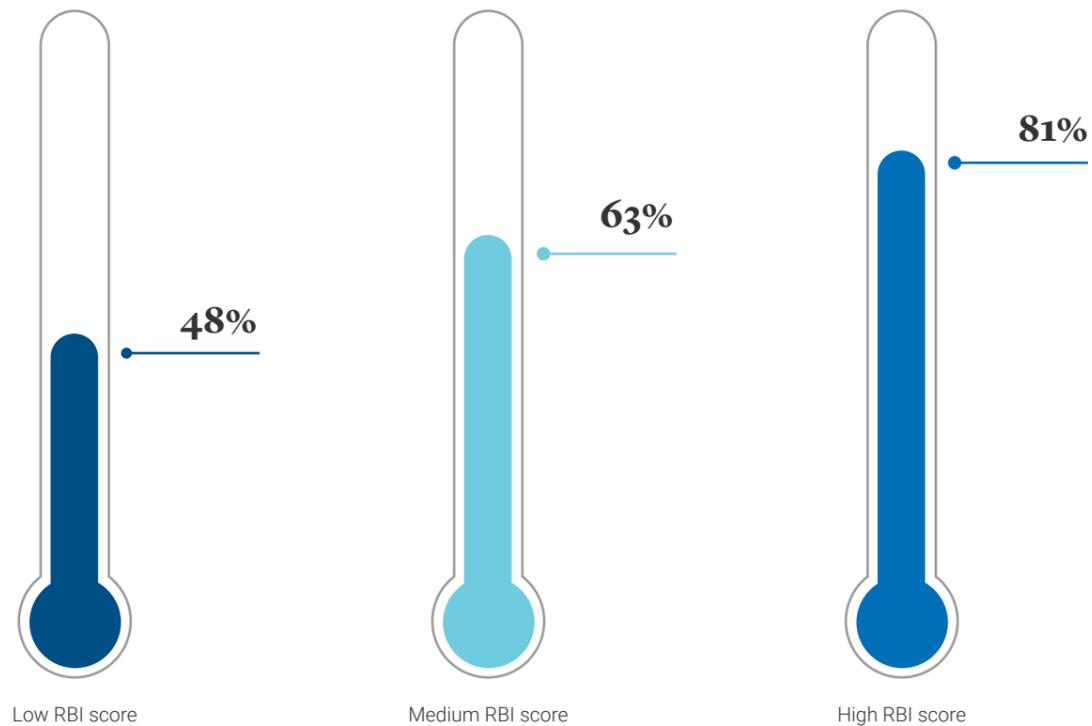
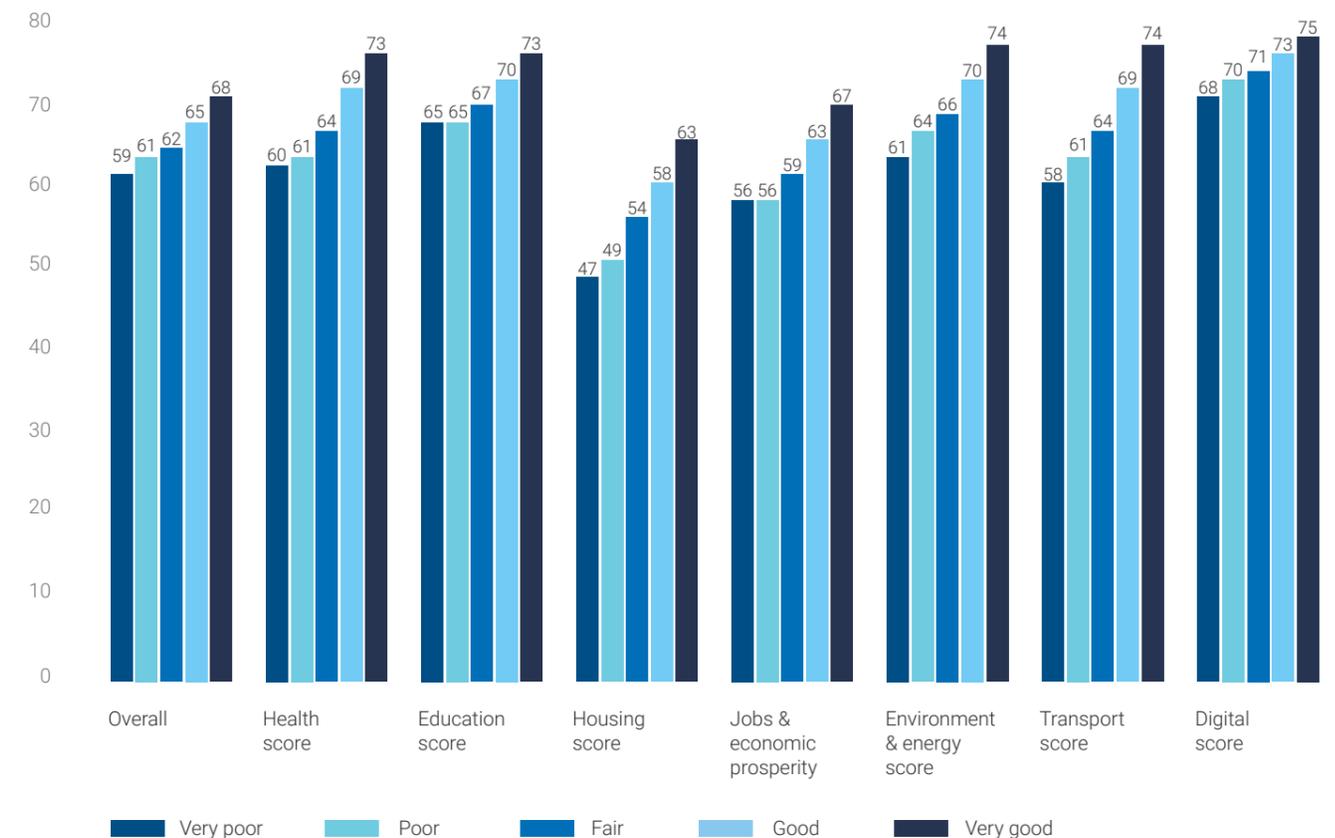


Figure 19. Average RBI scores by self-reported health



Appendix 1: detailed methodology



L&G is working in partnership with research specialists H/ Advisors Cicero, to develop an index that combines key indicators of social and economic progress. The index – called the Rebuilding Britain Index (RBI) - Is designed to provide a benchmark of the UK's success in 'levelling up' the economy across the left behind communities and households in the wake of the global pandemic.

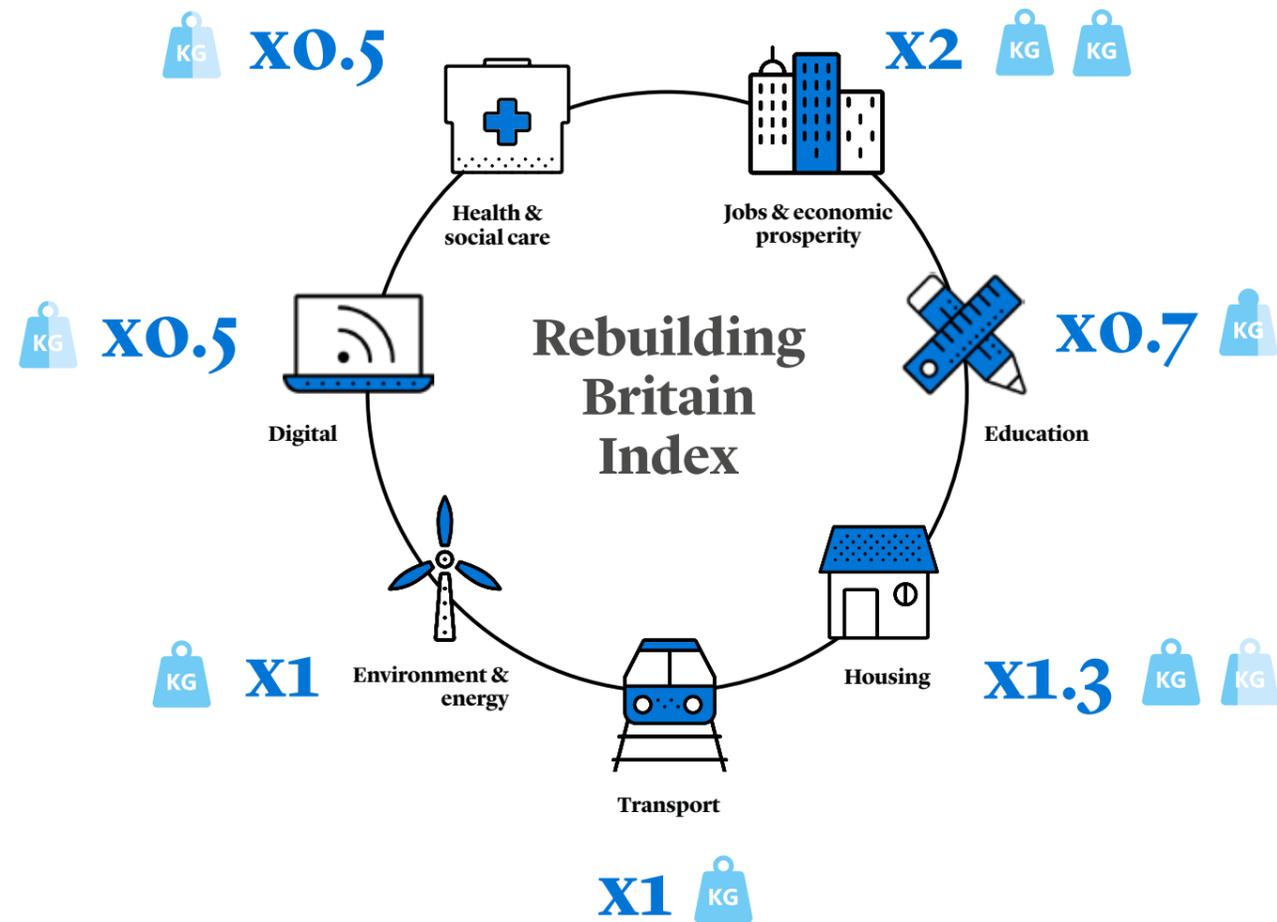
In developing the Index, we have identified seven key areas covering all aspects of the UK's economic and social infrastructure. For each of these seven areas we built out a series of quantitative and attitudinal statistical measures. In total, the RBI combines 52 different measures to provide a comprehensive assessment of how the UK's economic and social infrastructure is helping the UK to build back better. These measures are based on:

- A nationally representative survey (by age, gender and region) of 20,000 UK adults. Survey data collected across four waves – initially in December 2021 and subsequently in March 2022, June 2022 and September 2022
- Secondary data collected on eleven outcomes measures. The measures were chosen based on the following criteria: being updated quarterly, data being reported to a Local Authority level and consistency and comparability of data across the devolved nations. Data was sourced from:
 - ONS
 - Gov.Wales
 - Gov.Scot
 - Education NI
 - Gov.UK
 - OFGEM

Using the data collected, the index was created based on the following approach:

- A standardisation of all 52 measures onto a 1-100 scale – where ten would equal the highest positive score and one the lowest score.
- Undertaking analysis in order to identify the extent to which each measure correlates with perceived quality of life in the local community.
- We have assigned a relative weight of importance for each of the seven key areas. This is based on a statistical analysis to assess the strength of correlation between a given measure and the extent to which households feel quality of life locally is improving or worsening. Ultimately, this ensures that our index has been built with our communities in mind and with what matters most to them front and centre.

How the RBI is weighted across the seven key measures



‘Up-weighted’ factors

Our research analysis reveals that access to jobs, economic prosperity and housing are the key drivers in boosting a household’s perceived quality of life and economic wellbeing. To reflect this, we have upweighted the jobs and economic prosperity and housing measures accordingly – meaning they have a greater influence on the overall RBI score.

‘Down-weighted’ factors

Other factors, such as health, social care, and education, are clearly important. But they have less of a daily touch point on most people’s lives, and therefore have a weaker influence in determining a person’s sense of quality of life and economic wellbeing. The overall index score has been weighted to reflect this.





H/ADVISORS
Cicero