

A grayscale image of a hand held palm up, with a red fabric sign attached to the palm. The sign has the word 'HUNGER' written on it in white, bold, capital letters. Above the hand, there is a stylized green plant with two leaves and a round fruit.

Cirencester  
**foodbanknews**

with Fairford & Tetbury

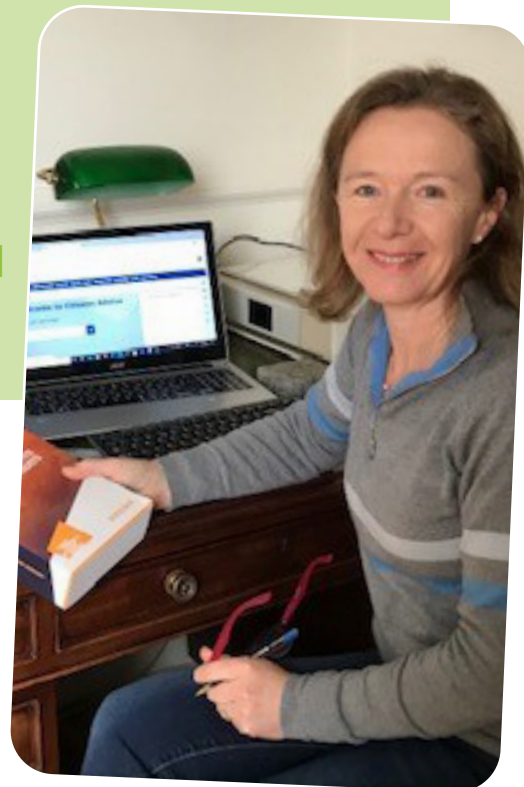
**How can we end the  
need for Foodbanks?**

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## Helen Denning

Foodbank Adviser  
for Cotswold & Stroud  
Citizens Advice



### What is your role?

My role as a Citizens Advice Foodbank Adviser, is to offer information and support to clients receiving food parcels. This is a new initiative and responds to the growing need for advice on issues such as; benefits, housing, debt, employment and much more. Since the start of the pandemic, Citizens Advice has moved to provide a phone and on-line service. However, it became clear we needed to look for new ways to ensure vulnerable and isolated clients had access to our services. This led to a funding request to The Trussell Trust for my role.

I started work in November from home, calling clients referred by the Cirencester Foodbank Team. I phone clients to discuss their situation and offer detailed and practical advice. The issues affecting clients are often complex and wide ranging and I can work with people over several weeks, to help resolve their problems.

### What motivated you to become involved in Foodbank?

I have been a Volunteer Adviser for Stroud Citizens Advice for nearly 5 years. I come from a background working in the Overseas Development Sector, but due to family circumstances had wanted to focus on helping communities closer to home. The training and support provided by Citizens Advice has been outstanding and when COVID hit last year I decided I had the capacity to do more. The Foodbank Adviser role was a great opportunity. I have been so impressed with the professionalism and care of the Cirencester team. It was really heartening to hear from one client just before Christmas, how receiving advent calendars in their food parcel had made her childrens' day and made her life just that little bit easier.

### What do you see as the challenges?

COVID has obviously challenged us all in different ways, but for many the pandemic has caused financial hardship on a new level. Accessing the benefit system for the first time, can be daunting and complex. I can check eligibility, guide them through the process and help them resolve problems. The pandemic has also presented new challenges for people living in the outlying villages, where bus transport and access to affordable food shopping is limited. Linking people to community services, including The Long Table – Freezer of Love and The Churn Project, has made an incredible difference to families. As Government support through the furlough scheme reduces and the freeze on evictions and debt holidays come to an end, the full impact of lockdown is going to become more evident. The partnership between the Foodbank and Citizens Advice will be an important element in supporting our community over the coming months.

### What are the opportunities?

As I look forward and consider what 2021 has in store for us, I'm hopeful that the upswell in community spirit, triggered by COVID will continue to flourish. It is this, combined with the courage and resilience of people that will help us all get through this emergency. Finally, as the vaccination programme continues, I am personally looking forward to returning to meet clients face to face. Technology has been so useful, but it is no substitute for human contact.

# The Trussell Trust strategy & our fit

Six years ago our umbrella organisation, The Trussell Trust, had a vision of a food bank in every town. That vision has sadly become a reality. Six years later, its strategy is for a UK without the need for food banks. The Trussell Trust has recently unveiled its five year strategy to meet this objective. Within this, there are three strategic priorities:

1. **Changing Communities** – empowering food banks to orientate their work towards ending the need for their services in their communities.
2. **Changing Policy** – working with partners to achieve evidence-based policy change through all levels of government to eradicate destitution in the UK.
3. **Changing Minds** – increasing public will for long-term solutions to end the need for food banks and build a movement for change.

So what does this mean locally? Our own food bank strategy (which we set in late 2019) already goes some way to meeting these objectives. This covers the following elements:

- Expanding geographic reach – become more accessible to those in the villages
- Expanding client reach – look at feasibility of developing delivery service
- Expanding core food offer – assess ways to add fruit/vegetables into food parcels
- Assisting clients out of food poverty – partner to ensure clients can access support and advice

The pandemic accelerated much of this strategy; forcing a move to develop a home delivery service much more quickly than we would have ever envisaged, this has also helped us extend our reach to become more accessible to those in villages and those who struggled to come into our centres from both a health and transport perspective. We've also been able to extend our fruit and vegetable provision through kind donations from The Organic Farm, The Market Garden and St Peter's Road residents. Through generous funding from the Hans and Julia Rausing Trust, the food bank was able to create Christmas hampers, including fresh meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese and Christmas crackers. These parcels were very gratefully received.

The final element of our strategy – assisting clients out of food poverty – has also seen significant progress. As you will have read in Helen's interview, the funding we secured to support a dedicated Citizens Advice adviser has been really well received. Our food bank volunteers call our clients when we receive their digital voucher and discuss their dietary, toiletries, household cleaning requirements. As part of that call they also offer the opportunity for a call from Helen. Our teams have been really encouraged at the uptake and the gratitude for the support they are offered. Helen is able to assist in complex benefits and housing situations.

We've also built out deeper partnerships with other organisations such as The Churn, the schools to help support the digital divide and in the development of

the Fairford and Lechlade wellbeing project as well as in similar activities in Tetbury. We regularly participate in the Cotswold District Council community and voluntary sector virtual meetings, all of which increasingly contribute to greater partnership working across our community.

A more recent development is the launch of our signposting service. We have created a volunteer team to call our clients back around a week after they have had their food parcel. The aim of this is to understand if there is more we can do to offer support. Our team will signpost to other local services or community groups and if necessary make a referral into Helen. So far the team has been able to assist on housing & homelessness as well as making referrals into Citizens Advice.

In 2021, we will continue to review and revamp our operating model; in the short-term the food bank will continue with a home delivery service and as COVID restrictions, hopefully loosen, will explore the possibilities of re-opening the centres. The model is likely to look very different and be driven by client preference (collection or delivery) to continue to meet the needs of our community. We are actively reviewing partnerships and where we can add further capacity to support our clients and ensure that there is advice capacity available to support our clients.

The food bank will also launch its annual "Food poverty in The Cotswolds" report in May. This will cover the year from April 2020 to March 2021. To receive a PDF copy, please [click here](#) to register your interest. The report will be shared with referral agencies, town and district councils as well as national politicians. It will show the change in food bank usage over the last year and shine a light on the impact the pandemic has had on our community. Our aim is to use our local data to highlight the challenges faced and help inform our community as to the drivers of food bank usage.





## Client feedback

A selection of the many comments we've received over the last few months. We are really grateful for all of those clients who take time to complete a feedback card (we provide a stamped addressed envelope for them to return the feedback)

*"I just wanted to say thank you. You have helped me more than you will ever know. It's so kind!"*

*"We would like to thank the Foodbank for helping us through these tough times. The support and supply of food before and after our Mum's passing is greatly appreciated."*

*"Family life took an unexpected turn down a road of ill health and subsequent money issues. Our once secure and fairly affluent life turned on its head as we struggled to navigate this new world of austerity dominated by a complex benefits system. Thankfully, charities such as the Foodbank have been here to sustain us (quite literally) as well as this practical help, their people have been a very friendly voice of support and encouragement. They helped us feel less isolated and were always keen to support us the best they could. The Foodbank has made a real difference to our family. Thank you!"*

*"We have been awaiting benefits for months. As soon as we think we're getting ahead we get hit by another debt bill. Addiction has been an issue and many debts are being paid back now for our past and even though we are doing good we can't get ahead. Thank you for all you have done for us."*

*"I was speaking with a grandparent of a client I am working with today. She said that the food bank has been an absolute life saver for her daughter and grandchildren; 'To see food in the cupboards helps to improve the whole mood of the house'."*

*"We are using the Foodbank for the first time because we have lost almost all our self-employment business and are struggling greatly due to Covid-19. We used to donate every so often but now we find that we need the support and donations! It is so important that a community can come together and realise the plight of so many at this time. Thank you so very much for your kindness. We are overwhelmed by your generosity and discretion it means people really do care about one another, which places hope back into many lives. Our appreciation to all of you! Words cannot describe this alone"*



*"I asked my children's school for help from the Foodbank because it was half term and I didn't receive my Universal Credit until the end of the week so I was very grateful to receive a food parcel that managed to feed us and included other things that I'd run out of (kitchen roll, washing up liquid, tea and coffee) Thank you so much for your help and support."*

*"Me and my children have recently left an abusive relationship. Trying to put myself through college and pay all bills with no income after bills left us very short with very little food. We are so very grateful for the food received and it is one less day I have to worry about what I'm going to do for food."*

*"Thank you so much for the food parcels. I'm very grateful for it I'm struggling with money due to the bedroom tax and won't be moved til all debts are paid for rent. Thank you for all food it's helped so much."*

*"I've recently been rehoused due to DV (domestic violence). I had no furniture etc to begin life again with my 1 year old son. I've been using it to help survive and get through the xmas period. The xmas hamper made me smile and has relieved so much pressure of not being able to provide. Thank you to everyone who has helped."*

*"Not sure how to word this, how pleased I was to receive my food parcel. It has helped me out so much with the children. Since being made redundant from work last October, pennies have been and still are tight all I can say is thank you, thank you, thank you."*

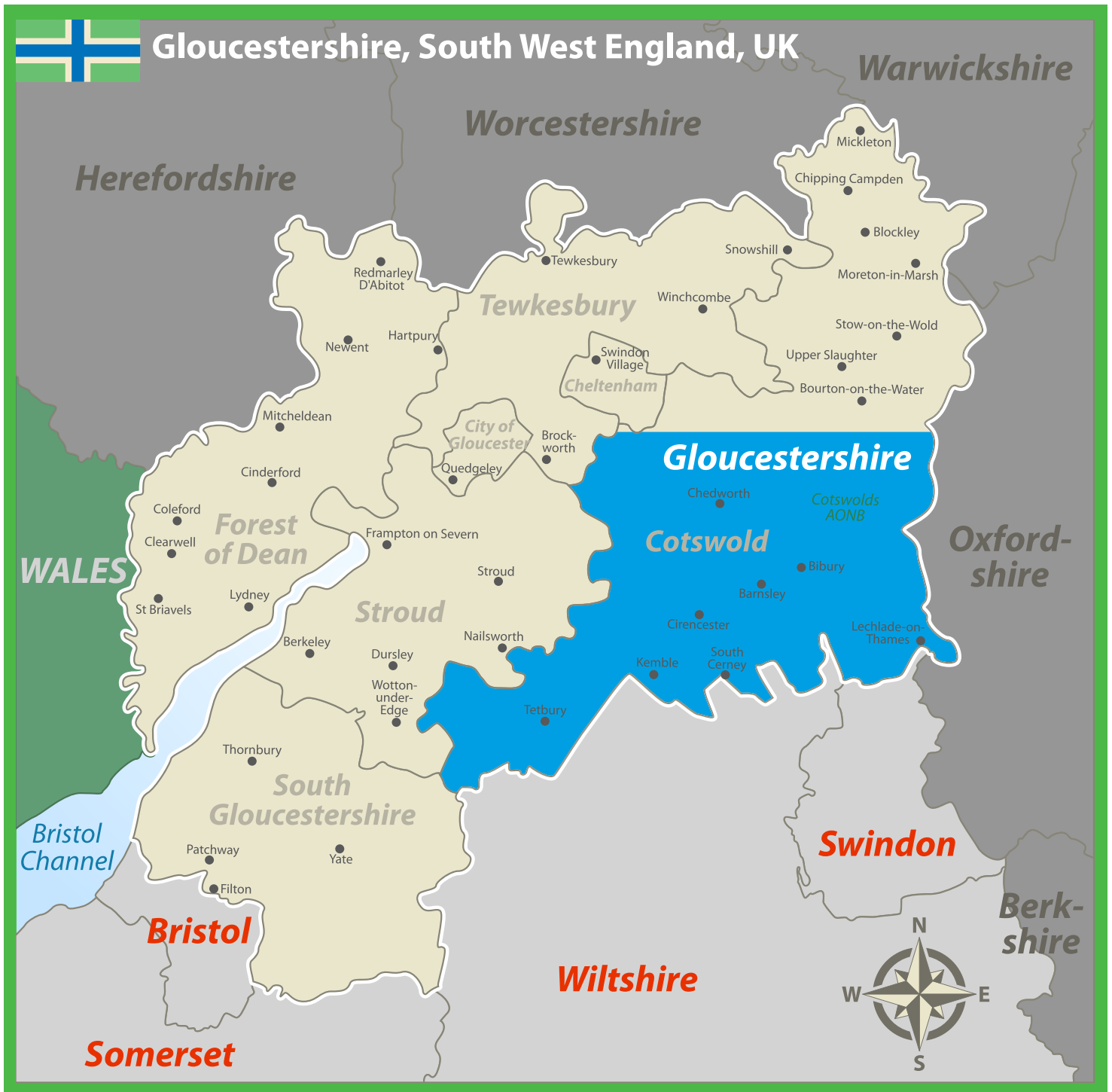
*"I was sadly diagnosed with cancer recently and it's turned my life around completely. Not being able to work and finding myself on SSP (statutory sick pay) and struggling to get benefits has made it impossible to pay bills, feed myself and my precious animals. Thanks to the kindness of some people I have been able to eat. Thank you"*




# Where does Cirencester Foodbank cover?

Cirencester Foodbank covers the entire South Cotswolds from Tetbury in the west of the Cotswold District across to Cirencester and then east to Fairford and Lechlade on the Oxfordshire, Wiltshire borders. To the north, it extends as far as Northleach. In

Gloucestershire, there are six other Trussell Trust food banks, Cheltenham, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, North Cotswolds, Stroud District and Tewkesbury. The digital voucher system means that the client is referred to their nearest food bank based on their postcode.



 Cirencester Foodbank area

## Ways to donate

The Foodbank is always very grateful for both food and monetary donations. There are a number of ways to donate financially:

1. Write a cheque to **Cirencester Foodbank**
2. Set a **standing order** up
3. Donate via *Virgin Giving*: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/cirencester-2>
4. Download a *gift aid form* here: [Gift Aid Form](#)

If you are considering donating, please also consider gift aiding your donation as this allows us to reclaim the tax on your behalf.

### Cirencester Foodbank – Social media

You can now follow Cirencester Foodbank on twitter or visit us on Facebook. Do sign up for updates so you can see how you can get involved!

 [@CirenFoodbank](#)

 [Ciren Foodbank](#)



## How to get help

To access Foodbank support, you need a voucher. They are available (virtually) from many different agencies including **Citizens Advice** on **0808 800 0511**, other local charities, schools and health professionals.

## Where to donate

You can donate at the following supermarkets:  
**Tesco Extra, Cirencester**  
**Waitrose, Cirencester**  
**Tesco, Tetbury**

## Cirencester Foodbank in numbers since 2012

Food  
donated  
**242,946**  
kilograms

Food  
given out  
**231,386**  
kilograms

Number  
of adults  
fed  
**14,915**

Number  
of children  
fed  
**12,724**

Number  
of voucher  
holding  
agencies  
**96**

For further details of the work of the Cirencester Foodbank and how you can be involved please:

**email:** [info@cirencester.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@cirencester.foodbank.org.uk)

or check out our

**website:** [www.cirencester.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.cirencester.foodbank.org.uk)

find us at

 [@CirenFoodbank](#)  [Ciren Foodbank](#)

or write to us at

**Cirencester Foodbank, Cirencester Baptist Church, Chesterton Lane, Cirencester GL7 1YE**

Charity registration number: 1159810

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