



Cirencester Food



# FOOD POVERTY IN THE SOUTH COTSWOLDS

APRIL 2020-MARCH 2021

# Section 1

# Overall state of play

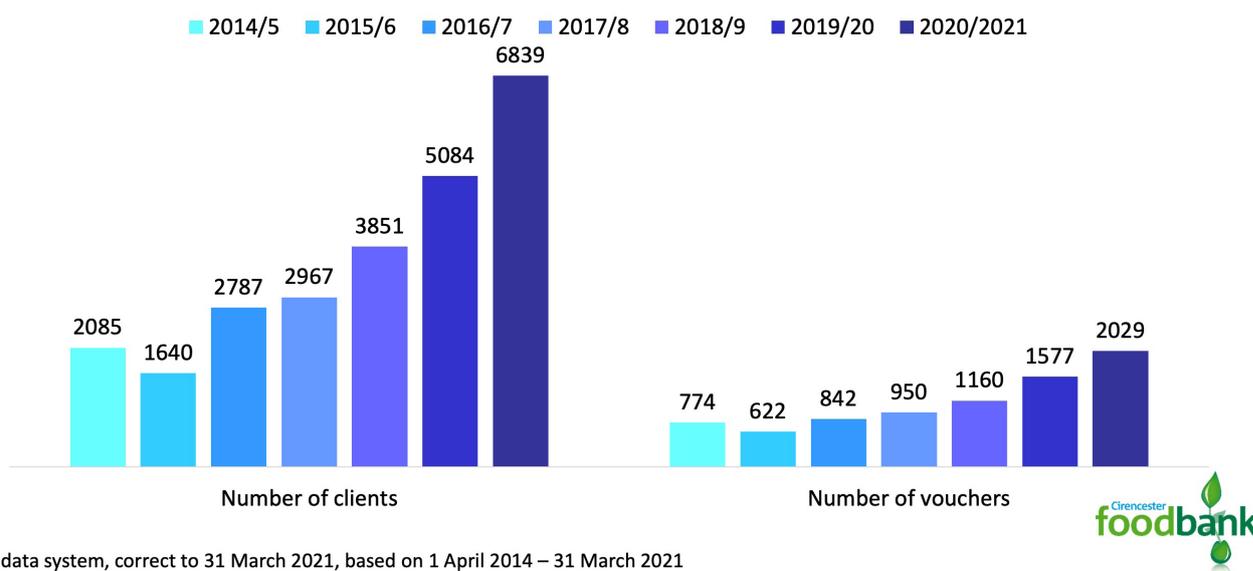
Food bank usage in the South Cotswolds grew 35% year-on-year in 2020/2021 to support 6,839 clients. Of this number, just over half went to children. Over the last three years food bank usage in the Cirencester food bank area has grown by 131%.

The COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled some of the growth in the last twelve months. 43% of vouchers cited COVID-19 as a contributing factor to the need for referral. More clients have been swept into food poverty as a result of furlough, redundancy, reduced hours, debt, illness and income that does not cover the cost of basics.

agencies held paper vouchers, which the client then presented in the food bank centres. When the pandemic struck and most agencies were forced to operate remotely, referral agencies were keen to move to the digital referral system. This has brought many advantages to agencies, clients and our teams.

Agencies can see if a client has been recently referred to a food bank and can then explore the reasons for referral. Once a voucher has been issued, the food bank team calls the client and checks dietary requirements, the need for any toiletries, household cleaning items, baby/nappies, sanitary as well as face

## Change in Foodbank demand over time



As a result of the pandemic, the food bank operating model underwent significant changes in April 2020. For the safety of all, the food bank temporarily closed all four food bank centres in Cirencester, Fairford and Tetbury. With the initial support of furloughed British Gas volunteers the food bank moved to a home delivery service which enabled it to meet the demands of its clients and ensure everyone's safety. Once the British Gas volunteers returned to work, the Foodbank recruited a delivery driver to enable it to continue the delivery service. The food bank is continually reviewing when and how to re-open centres safely and it anticipates that it will operate a hybrid service in the future.

To access food bank support, households must be referred in via front-line professionals. Pre-COVID,

masks, flour and cooking oil and any other extras available. Parcels are then personalised and delivered to the client the next day.

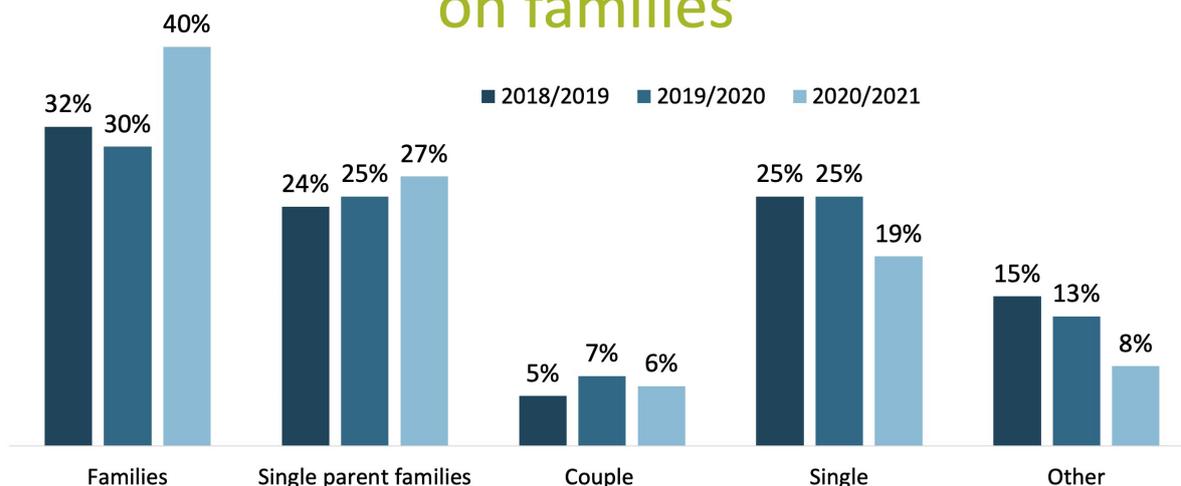
The digital system also allows the food bank to plan; previously food bank centres didn't know who had been issued a voucher or how many clients would present in any one session.

The impact of the various lockdowns through 2020 and 2021 highlighted different needs. In the initial lockdown, the Foodbank saw an immediate increase in demand in March 2020 of 139% year-on-year increase, followed by 76% in April, 141% in May, this calmed slightly through the summer months with year-on-year increases averaging around 25% in the second half. At the start of

2021 with the new lockdown, January and February saw significant rises in demand as the need rose again. The food bank recorded a 33% decrease in demand year-on-year in March 2021, however, despite this drop, March 2021 remains significantly higher than any previous March (outside of March 2020). The food bank would expect demand to be lower in the April 2021-March 2022 period, if the pandemic situation eases.

capacity for food bank clients in The Churn Project and it continually reviews the voucher data to understand the gaps in local provision. The food bank is in the unique position of spanning a broad geographical area from Tetbury in the west to Fairford and Lechlade in the east. Each community has differing provision and needs, but food bank engagement with referral agencies across the district enables it to identify areas

## The pandemic has placed greater impact on families



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

\*Other denotes households with adults only



Cirencester Foodbank has four key strategic objectives:

- Expanding geographic reach
- Expanding client reach
- Expanding core food offer
- Assisting clients out of food poverty

The pandemic enabled the food bank to make progress on all of these objectives, being able to ensure it is accessible to all (including those in the villages or unable to attend a centre) and developing a home delivery service. The food bank has further been able to supplement the food parcel with fresh fruit and vegetables courtesy of kind donations from The Organic Farm.

The final strand of the strategy to assist clients out of food poverty is to help articulate the needs of our community. This report will be shared with referral agencies, councils, donors, volunteers and the general community to help explain the reasons behind food poverty. The first edition helped enable the food bank to receive grant funding to bring a dedicated Citizens Advice adviser alongside food bank clients, build

where support can be enhanced. The food bank's primary aim is see the end of food poverty and the need for our Foodbank. Covid-19 has highlighted the causes of food poverty and a greater awareness of why food banks are needed has been noted by many. The Foodbank's goal is to use this enhanced awareness to help find a way of ending the need for our services in our community.

*"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"*

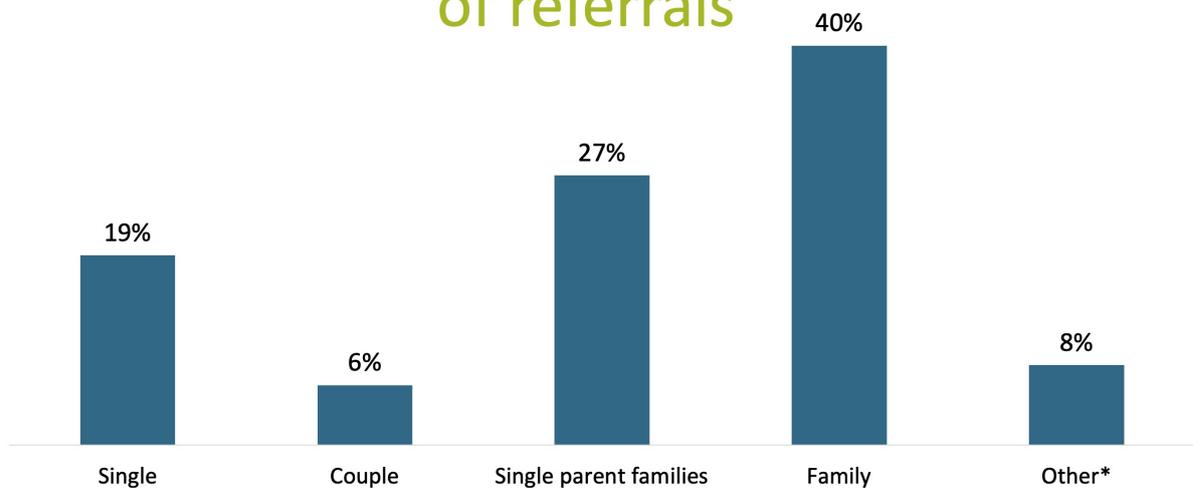
## Section 2

# Impact on families

With just over half of emergency food parcels going to children in the last 12 months, the impact of the pandemic on families is significant. The effect of food poverty continues to be greatest on children of aged 11 or under with 67% (a very similar percentage to 2019/2020) of parcels going to families with primary-aged children or under.

The food bank works closely with schools, The Churn Project, Home Start, Cirencester Opportunity Group, Families First Plus and Early Help to help support children and families.

### Families make up a significant proportion of referrals



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

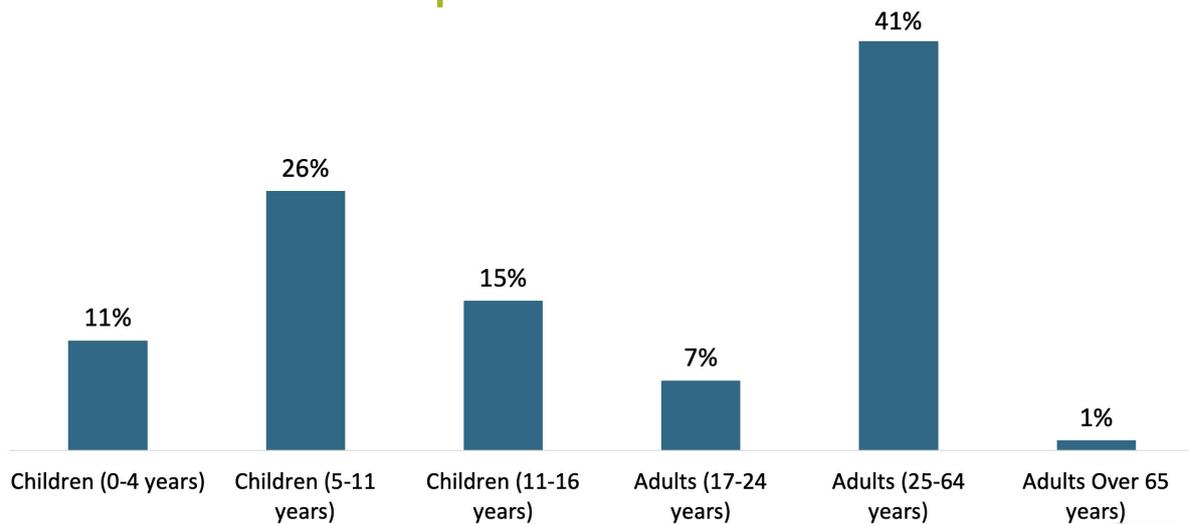
\*Other denotes households with adults only



The actions the government took to provide support to free school meal children during the school closures and school holidays has reduced some of this hardship; however there are growing numbers of families who do not qualify for free school meals and struggle on low-incomes and insecure employment. Many families that we have spoken to in the last twelve months have explained that they are struggling due to reduced income, of not being able to work because of school closures (and in lockdown one unable to find additional childcare), increased energy costs because of children at home, additional costs of needing to support home learning and bridging the digital divide.

*"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."*

## Over 50% of parcels went to children



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

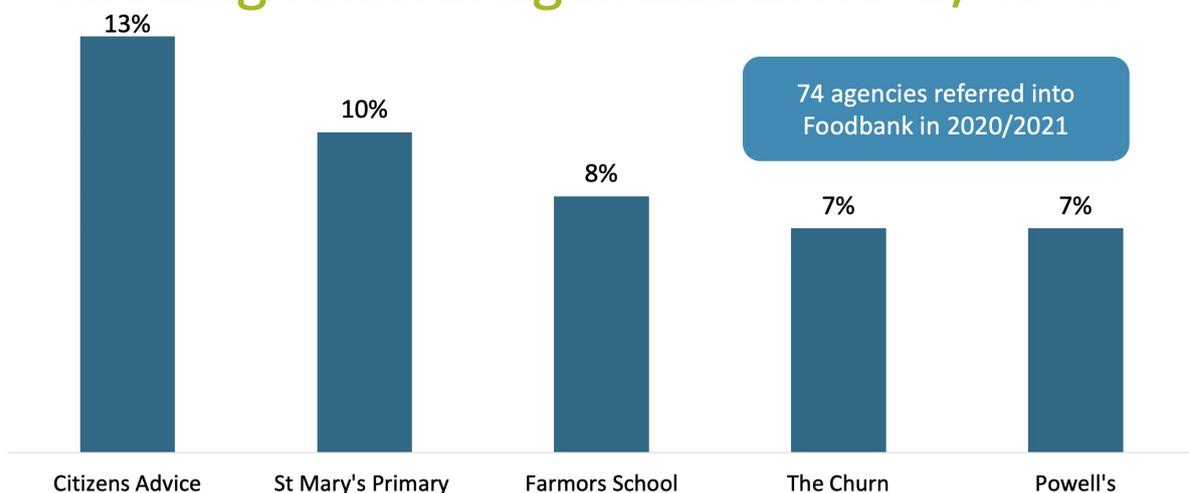
# Section 3 Referral agencies

2020/2021 saw significant changes in food bank referral agencies. Almost all had to change their operating models and adapt to meet the needs of their clients and to ensure the safety of their teams.

In the last twelve months, 74 referral agencies made at least one referral to the food bank. The Citizens Advice service made 13% of all referrals in 2020/2021,

the National Citizens Advice helpline (set up by CA nationally to support its CA franchises) contributed a further 2%. The primary school in Tetbury accounted for 10% of referrals and the secondary school in Fairford for 8% of referrals. Cirencester-based The Churn Project was responsible for 7% of referrals, with Powell's school adding a further 7%. Cirencester Primary and Watermoor schools both made 4% of referrals. Children's social

## Leading referral agencies in 2020/2021



74 agencies referred into Foodbank in 2020/2021



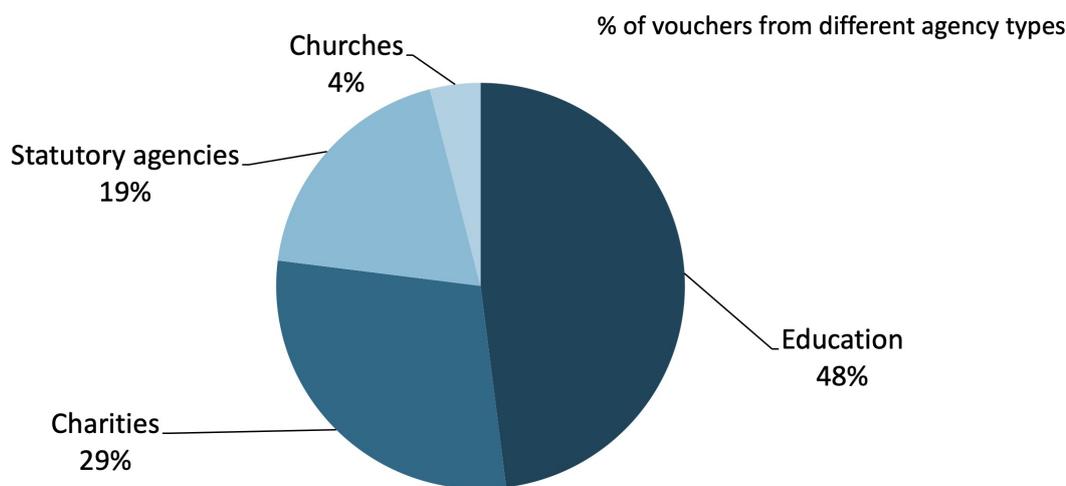
Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

services accounted for 3.5%, Cotswold District Council and P3 each made 3% of referrals. 64% of all referrals were made by these ten organisations.

Schools play an important role in referrals to the food bank. It is noted that larger schools and those schools outside of Cirencester, play a significant role in referring to the food bank. This is often because other agencies (for example pre-Covid, Citizens Advice did not have any physical coverage in the Fairford/Lechlade areas) are not as visible outside of Cirencester and the pastoral role the schools play is heightened.

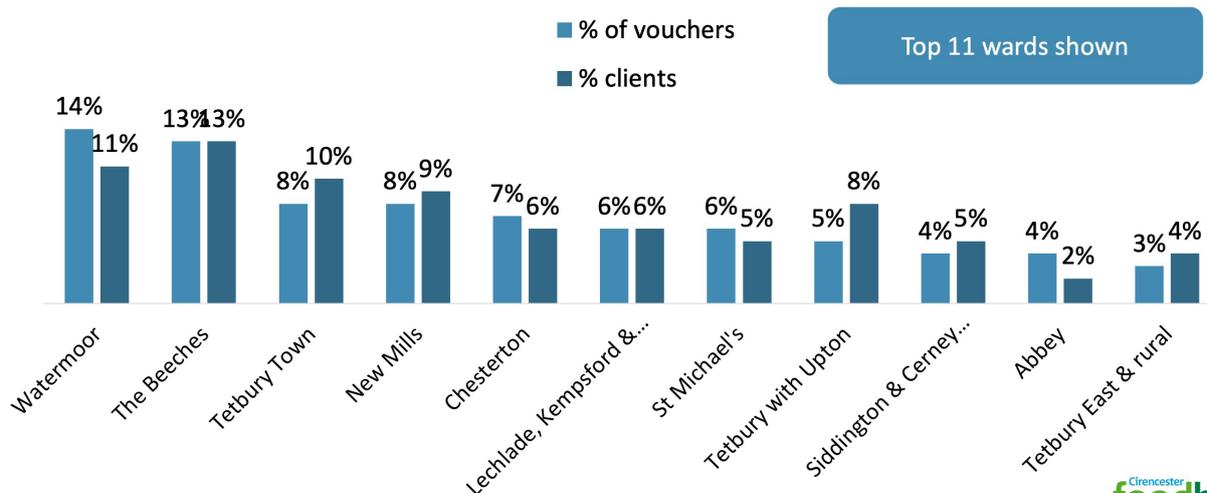
of all referrals. The remaining 19% was made up from Kemble, South Cerney and Siddington wards contributing 8%, with the remaining being split across a broad area encompassing The Ampneys & Hampton, Coln Valley, Chedworth & Churn Valley and the Ermin wards. The number of referrals for clients with no fixed abode dropped in 2020/2021 primarily due to actions taken to reduce rough sleeping during the lockdowns.

## Our types of referral agency



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

## Client referrals by ward



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

Wards in Cirencester contributed 49% of all referrals in 2020/2021, with the Fairford and Lechlade wards adding 10% of referrals and Tetbury area wards contributed 22%

The food bank works closely with referral agencies to ensure that their teams understand how and when a food bank referral should be made.

# Section 4

# Reasons for referral

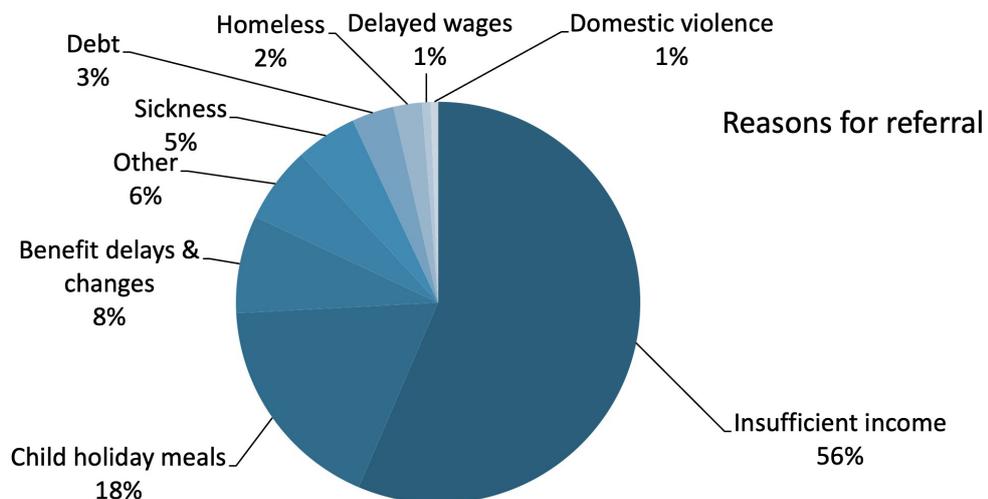
The reasons for food bank referral are varied.

Crises are lasting longer, with an average of 3.4 vouchers per client in the last twelve months. This is increased from 2.81 in 2018/2019 and 3 in 2019/2020. 59% of food bank clients in the last twelve months required three referrals or less.

remotely and less support (in the early stages) of the pandemic to those needing support for benefits.

There was a slight increase in "other" referrals, analysis of this shows COVID-19 was the prime factor in almost all of these referrals. Other reasons were, for example, theft of wallets and unexpected bills from cars or

## Insufficient income to cover cost of basics



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021



In 2020/2021 nearly 60% of all referrals cited insufficient income to cover the cost of essentials. This was an increase from 39% in 2019/2020. Many clients were referred as a result of furlough not covering costs of living (many were already struggling on 100% income, only receiving 80% on furlough created crises for many). The food bank also noted an increased number of self-employed clients who did not qualify for any government support. Owing to the government funding provided to children on free school meals, child holiday meals dropped from 27% of referrals to 18% in 2020/2021. Many families continue to struggle in the holiday periods (and while the additional support is very welcome to those that qualify); there are many families who are slightly above the free school meal threshold.

Benefits delays and changes contributed 8% of referrals, down from 16% in 2019/2020. The food bank believes that this is down to agencies operating

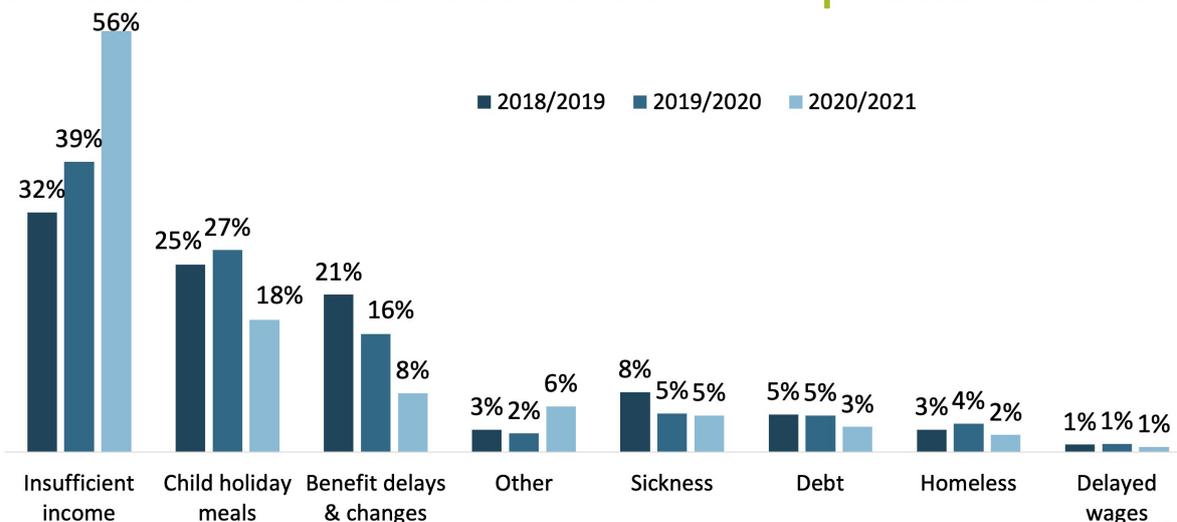
boilers. Sickness accounted for 5% of vouchers, the same proportion as the previous year. Debt made up 3% of referrals (down from 5%), however, many clients benefitted from rent and bill holidays. Initial evidence in this current year is showing greater numbers of clients being referred with debt as they key cause of crisis. The food bank expects this number to continue to rise as the economic impact of the pandemic is felt.

Homeless referrals dropped slightly, primarily because government guidance ensured that those homeless were given accommodation and the food bank gave bulk donations to the homeless shelters (via the District Council) to ensure they had sufficient supplies and to reduce the number of referrals. Domestic abuse referrals increased slightly and accounted for 1% of all referrals in 2020/2021.

The food bank does not have a three voucher rule, rather it issues a guideline to the referral agencies of three vouchers in a six month period, however, it recognises that for many clients, three vouchers is insufficient and would not (for example) cover the 5 week wait for Universal Credit, nor does it support those families with ongoing issues connected to furlough, reduced hours and income. The food bank has also observed that local support agencies are significantly stretched and thresholds for support have risen.

*"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'."*

## Insufficient income becomes prime factor



Source: TT data system, correct to 31 March 2021, based on 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021



## Section 5

# Signposting and support

In order to help offer further support and advice to food bank clients and to reduce the need for further food bank referrals, the Foodbank has developed advisory and signposting capabilities. In 2020, it partnered with Citizens Advice to recruit and fund a dedicated adviser for Foodbank clients (originally intended to be based in Fairford), however, owing to the pandemic, the grant was re-purposed to be an adviser operating virtually for all food bank clients. Since the end of October, 118 clients have gone through to Citizens Advice for further support on debt, housing and benefits.

The food bank has also developed a signposting service. This service is operated by food bank volunteers who call clients back a few days after their delivery. The aim of this is to understand if there is more we can do to offer support. The team will signpost to other local services or community groups and if necessary make a referral into Citizens Advice. Since mid-January the team has made over 80 calls and has made further referrals to Citizens Advice, provided signposting to Salvation Army, The Churn Project and into organisations such as Turn2us and the Community Money Advice service.

It is the aim of the food bank to continue to extend and expand its signposting and support services as it recognises that providing the additional level of support is valued by clients in assisting them out of food poverty.



**118 Citizens Advice referrals**



**82 signposting calls**

*"I would just like to also add that the support you give to the community is outstanding and the development to link up with Citizen Advice support to provide the foodbank advisor role is really helpful to the families we support."*

## Section 6

## Donations and volunteers

In the April 2020-March 2021 period, the food bank distributed nearly 60 tonnes of food and toiletries. It received donations of more than 66 tonnes in the same period. The food bank is incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support it continues to receive. The street collections that popped up in lockdown one alongside the Royal Mail collecting for us on Saturdays was incredible. It is so heartening to see so many of our community come together to support one another.

Volunteers have always and continue to play a vital role in supporting food bank operations. In March 2020 over 70% had to pause volunteering because of the shielding requirements. Again, the food bank saw many new volunteers step forward (as a result of furlough, remote working and desire to support). While food banks centres remain closed and the warehouse continues to operate under social distancing measures, capacity for volunteering has been slightly reduced. Despite this, the food bank has created new volunteering roles in our telephone and signposting teams, which has enabled shielding volunteers to continue to be involved. More than 200 local people volunteer with us and the support afforded is invaluable. Thank you!



**204 people volunteer**

**20%**

of children in the  
Cotswolds live in poverty

source: End Child Poverty UK, May2021  
(for year ended March 2020)

**51%**

food parcels went to  
children in 2020/2021

Nearly

**60%**

of referrals cited insufficient income  
as the prime cause of referral

**67%**

of parcels went  
to families



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

07762 168297 • [info@cirencester.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@cirencester.foodbank.org.uk) • [www.cirencester.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.cirencester.foodbank.org.uk)  
Charity registration number: 1159810 • Registered in England and Wales