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# A Practical Guide to Flexible Working

 **GOOD BUSINESS  
PATHFINDER** CORNWALL &  
ISLES OF SCILLY

# Small changes, tested safely

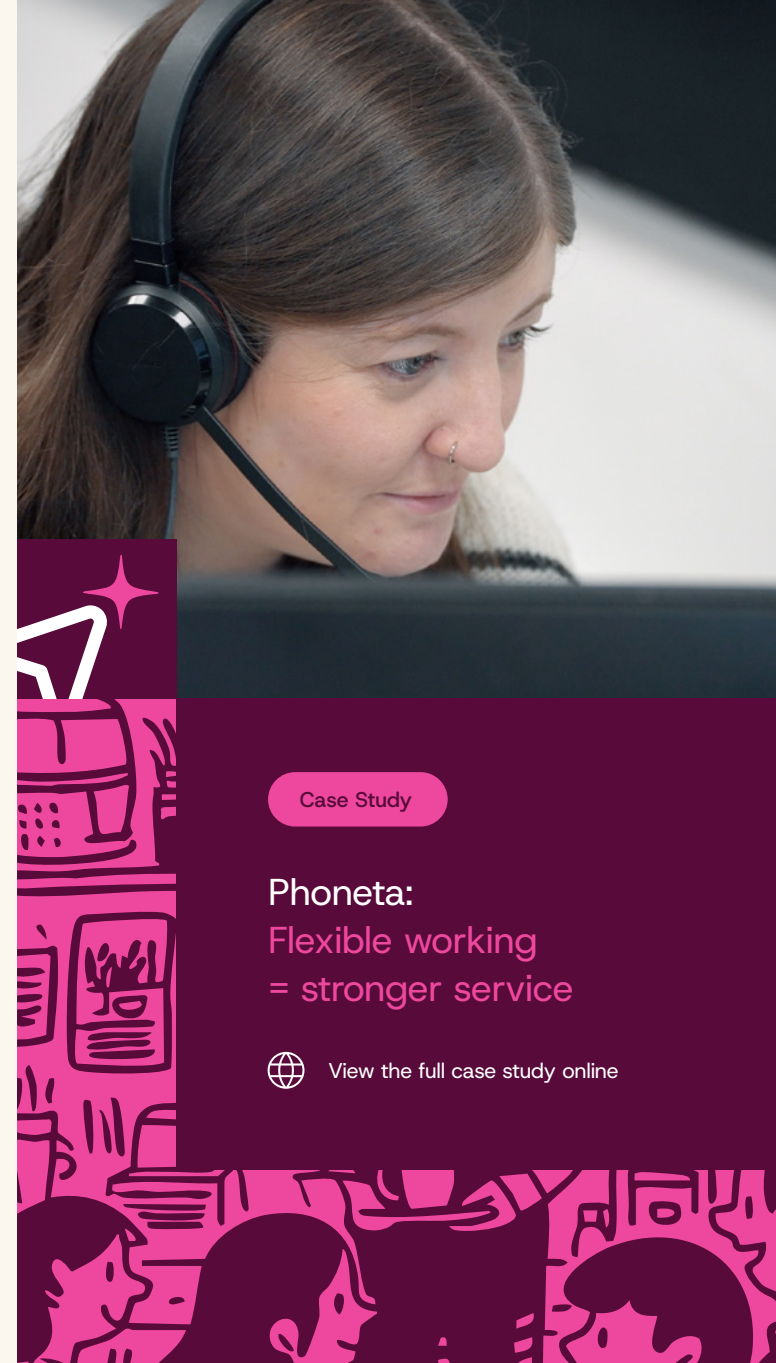
Running an SME in Cornwall often means trying to keep customers happy with a small team. You might be dealing with seasonal demand, long commutes, skills shortages, or simply the reality that people have caring responsibilities and lives outside work. Flexible working is one practical way to improve resilience while also helping good people stay.

Flexible working is about changing where work happens, when it happens, or how many hours are worked, and watching the “how much” so workload matches the hours.

You do not need to overhaul everything at once. Small changes, tested safely, can reduce rota stress, cut overtime, and make recruitment and retention easier.


A Cornwall example shows what’s possible. **Phoneta, a 24/7 telephone answering and contact service**, has to cover a rota 365 days a year while coping with peaks and troughs in call volumes.

They’ve used homeworking, clearer ways for staff to show availability, and broad cross-training so service can continue through disruption.



Case Study

**Phoneta:**  
Flexible working  
= stronger service

 [View the full case study online](#)



# Five Steps on Your Way to Flexible Working

Think of flexible working as a pathway, not a one-off policy. Start where you are, assess what works, and build from there.



<p><b>1. Start with customer cover and business reality</b></p>	<p><b>2. Match flexibility to tasks, not job titles</b></p>	<p><b>3. Make it fair, and bring people with you</b></p>	<p><b>4. Manage by outcomes, not "being seen"</b></p>	<p><b>5. Use trials, review points, and keep workload realistic</b></p>
<p>Before you agree new patterns, get clear on:</p> <p><u>When customers need you most</u></p> <p><u>What genuinely must be done on-site or at fixed times</u></p> <p><u>Where your weekly or seasonal pinch points are</u></p> <p>This keeps flexibility focused on business outcomes, not favours.</p>	<p>Most SMEs have more options than they think. Flexible working is often a mix of:</p> <p><u>Where: on-site, occasional homeworking, hybrid/mobile work</u></p> <p><u>When: staggered start/finish, core hours, shift swaps, compressed weeks</u></p> <p><u>How long: part-time, job share, annualised or term-time hours</u></p> <p>Instead of saying "this role can't be flexible", break the job into tasks and spot what can move.</p>	<p>Flexible working is as much about culture as schedules. Fairness and consistency are common sticking points.</p> <p><u>Explain the "why" (cover, retention, wellbeing, fewer emergencies)</u></p> <p><u>Ask staff for ideas early: they often know what will work</u></p> <p><u>Use clear criteria: customer impact, skill cover, team workload</u></p> <p><u>Remember it's give-and-take: both sides share responsibility</u></p>	<p>Agree what "good" looks like:</p> <p><u>Deadlines and quality standards</u></p> <p><u>Handovers (how work is passed on)</u></p> <p><u>Availability (when someone can be contacted)</u></p> <p>When flexible working works best, managers step back from time-and-place detail and focus on what needs doing, by when and to what standard.</p> <p>Phoneta found that simple technology for monitoring availability and scheduling shifts helped make flexibility workable.</p>	<p>Arrangements are not forever. Build in review dates and be open to tweaks. Two essentials:</p> <p><u>Trial periods for anything new (for example 6-8 weeks)</u></p> <p><u>If hours reduce, reduce workload or targets too - flexibility is not a solution to overload.</u></p> <p>Many small firms start with informal flexibility. That's fine, but if an arrangement becomes "the new normal", write it down in plain English so everyone knows what's agreed.</p>



Guide

## What You Can Do Tomorrow

Low-cost, low-risk actions  
you can start this week:



### Do a quick “where/when/how long/ how much” scan

Where are you already flexible,  
and where are the friction points?  
There’s some handy tools for this  
on the CIPD site.

 [CIPD Website](#)



### Ask your team

“What change would  
make work easier without  
harming customers?”



### Pick one safe test

- [Staggered starts](#)
- [Clearer shift swaps](#)
- [One admin-from-home block](#)
- [A simple core-hours window](#)



### Start a handover habit

- [Done](#)
  - [Urgent](#)
  - [Waiting-on](#)
- in a shared note.



### Write down the basics of any new agreement and set a review date

ACAS has a flexible working  
[policy template](#) to get you started.

 [View ACAS Policy Template](#)



## What You Can Do

# Over The Next Three Months

Introduce light structure so flexibility stays workable and fair:



### Map demand and skills

When do you need which skills, and where are the gaps?



Create a one-page “how we handle flexible working” note

What you can consider, how decisions are made, and how reviews work.



### Run one pilot with a simple success check

Rota gaps

Overtime

Customer response times

Errors/rework

Staff feedback



If you receive a statutory request, follow ACAS guidance

Consult before refusing, and decide within two months.



Keep customers in the loop if contact times change, and make sure flexible workers still join key team meetings and training



Guide

What You Can Do

# Over The Next 12 Months

Higher-impact actions, with investment only where it makes sense:



## Keep development fair

Flexible workers should get the same progression opportunities.



## Measure progress simply

Retention

Overtime

Customer response times



## Invest to remove bottlenecks

Basic rota tools

Better remote access

Kit that supports safe homeworking



## Recruit with flexibility in mind (where it's genuine)

This can widen your talent pool.



## Build resilience through cross-training and cover plans

Phoneta trains staff widely so service can continue when disruption hits.



Conclusion


# Progress, Not Perfection

Flexible working is not a luxury or a “work from home” trend. It’s a practical way of organising work so customers are covered and people can perform well without burning out.

Phoneta’s story shows the pattern:

Start with business needs, talk to staff early, use simple systems to manage availability, and keep arrangements under review.

 [View the full case study online](#)



Start small.  
Keep going.  
Celebrate progress.

One conversation and unlock further support, look at Good Business Pathfinder resources and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Growth Hub.

For further business support, get in touch with the **Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Growth Hub.**

[Visit](#)



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