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Government Unveils Streamlined Rules for Outdoor Dining and Later Pub Hours

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The UK government has announced plans to simplify licensing rules, enabling restaurants, pubs, and clubs to expand al fresco dining and extend operating hours with reduced red tape. The move is intended to boost economic activity and revitalise the hospitality sector, which has struggled in the face of rising costs and regulatory burdens.

Under the proposed reforms, local councils will be stripped of automatic veto powers over late-night licence applications in designated nightlife areas. Instead, decision-making authority in London will shift to the mayor, who will be able to intervene when councils are deemed to be obstructing reasonable applications. If successful, this pilot scheme may be expanded to other major cities such as Manchester and Leeds.

The changes form part of the government's wider "Plan for Change" strategy aimed at cutting unnecessary regulation and stimulating growth. The hospitality industry, which contributes approximately £62 billion annually to the UK economy and supports over three million jobs, is expected to benefit significantly. Ministers have argued that outdated licensing procedures have suppressed business growth and harmed local high streets.

One key aspect of the plan includes streamlining the process for businesses to secure permission for outdoor seating. This will involve shorter consultation periods, lower administrative fees, and a renewed effort to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy. In London, a new £300,000 "Summer Streets" fund will support local authorities in processing applications more efficiently, with some councils set to waive or cut fees altogether.

The British Beer & Pub Association and UK Hospitality have welcomed the announcement, describing it as a long-overdue step toward supporting an industry central to Britain's cultural and social fabric. Industry leaders emphasised that allowing extended trading hours and greater use of outdoor space is vital to long-term viability, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises that have faced disproportionate challenges since the pandemic.

The government plans to launch a £1.5 million Hospitality Support Scheme to tackle staffing shortages and expand employment opportunities. The initiative includes targeted training for ex-offenders and others seeking a pathway back into the workforce, underscoring the government's focus on both economic and social reintegration.

Although the initial reforms will be tested in the capital, ministers have signalled their intent to roll out similar initiatives across England. By rebalancing decision-making and encouraging local enterprise, the government aims to ensure Britain's hospitality sector remains a driver of growth, tourism, and community cohesion.