Office of the Chief Information Officer
delivering eHealth Ireland,
Dr. Steevens' Hospital
Steevens' Lane
Dublin 8

Ph: 01 635 2732
Fax: 01 635 2740

Feidhmeannas Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

7th November 2019

Deputy Alan Kelly T.D.
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Re: PQ Number: 44700/19 To ask the Minister for Health the number of computers in the HSE that still use an operating system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ Number: 44701/19 To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE will not be forced to make additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ Number: 44702/19 To ask the Minister for Health if his Department and the HSE have a plan in place to protect themselves in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Kelly,

I have detailed below the response to your 3 Parliamentary questions.

Response to PQ Number: 44700/19

The HSE has an estate of over 58,000 desktop's and Laptop's devices operating today. The majority of these are Windows 7 devices (circa 46,000). We have a standard Windows 10 build and are addressing the Windows 7 end of life issue through an accelerated refresh programme.

The HSE standard desktop and laptop build is Windows 10, with some exceptions where application restrictions dictate a Windows 7 environment. These exceptions have programmes of work to address their backend applications and enable the move of the desktop to a Windows 10 environment.

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The HSE have a programme of work underway to refresh the desktop estate at pace thereby addressing the windows 7 risk. In addition, all of our devices have a current endpoint device protection suite installed which reduces the risk that malware and other vulnerabilities penetrate our systems.

The range and complexity of health systems make it very challenging and expensive for the Health Services to keep pace with technological changes, this is not just an issue for the HSE but a challenge for many other Health Services internationally.

Response to PQ Number: 44701/19

For Windows 7 there is no Custom Support Agreement (CSA, as there was for previous windows operating. A CSA enables large enterprises purchase extended custom support for an end of life Microsoft product. The HSE has an extended warranty to June 2020 for 16,000 Windows 7 devices at a cost of €330k.
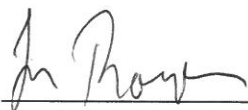
Response to PQ Number: 44701/19

The size and complexity of Health organisations determines that a level of legacy technology will always exist and these risks needs to be managed. The HSE have IT controls in place to mitigate risk with respect to cyber-attacks to security risks. These controls include but are not limited to real-time inventory of our estate, endpoint protection for devices, intrusion detection and best practice network protection on the perimeter.

The HSE does take its cyber security responsibilities seriously. This year approval was sought and received for a General Manager post to support and deliver the technical management of Cyber Security within the HSE. The recruitment of this person will continue our investment in Cyber-Security and our Cyber-Security programmes of work.

If you feel that the questions have not be fully answered or you require any further clarity please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Fran Thompson,
Interim Chief Information Officer, OoCIO, HSE.