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Jennifer Carroll MacNeill spoke to Dylan Hutchinson on a Dublin beach about a Snapchat post he made when he was 18

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## Fine Gael council candidate Dylan Hutchinson confronted by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill over derogatory Snapchat post

Sonja Tutty

Friday December 11 2020, 12.01am GMT, The Times

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A young Fine Gael candidate dropped his campaign for a council seat after being confronted on a Dublin beach by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill about a derogatory social media post he made about a previous TD.

Dylan Hutchinson, 19, was nominated as a candidate to fill a vacancy on Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown county council after Barry Ward was appointed to the Seanad in April.

[Ms Carrol MacNeill](#), 40, a TD for Dún Laoghaire and Fine Gael spokeswoman for equality, met Mr Hutchinson and his father on Killiney beach, due to public health guidelines, alongside another Fine Gael official in June.

The candidate was presented with a screenshot of a Snapchat message he made when he was 18, which said: “Ding dong the witch is gone.” The post was regarding Kate O’Connell, a previous TD for Dublin Bay South, who lost her seat in the February general election.

It is understood Mr Hutchinson was asked to consider stepping back from the contest due to the nature of the message. It is also understood that Ms MacNeill suggested she would have to consider sharing the Snapchat post with members of the Blackrock ward of Fine Gael if he remained a candidate.

In emails seen by *The Times*, a Fine Gael official said the meeting required investigation and it could be seen as an “interference in the democratic process”.

A source, who asked not to be named, said they felt Mr Hutchinson was “coerced” into withdrawing.

They said Mr Hutchinson contacted Fine Gael’s regional organiser regarding the meeting on Killiney beach, but no formal complaint was made. Following advice from another

council official, the matter was brought to the party's general-secretary. It is understood that no reply or advice was then received from the general-secretary.

The source said they were concerned by the way the matter had been handled by the party, and by how the candidate had been treated. "It is in the public interest for the electorate of Dún Laoghaire to be aware of this incident," they said.

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Mr Hutchinson, currently director of campaigns for Young Fine Gael, declined to comment.

Ms Carroll MacNeill confirmed that she met Mr Hutchinson after Fine Gael members and councillors contacted her about the Snapchat which was spread on social media.

In a statement yesterday, she said: "I was concerned about this post both because I felt it was not acceptable for the party in preserving dignity and respect for everyone in public life and because I knew that it would become a personal problem for the candidate, either as a candidate or as a councillor if successful in the election."

She added: "My intention was to impress upon him the public import of the social media post made after the election and to say that I would need ultimately to let voting delegates know about this in some way before they made their choice on the new public representative for the Blackrock area."

Ms Carroll MacNeill said she asked Mr Hutchinson to "reflect on his candidacy" or to "consider stepping back" from the election. "I said that we all make lots of mistakes, especially when we are young and that I knew I had made plenty along the way," she said.

Mr Hutchinson emailed the TD the next day to state that he would continue his campaign for election and would rather “deal with his error now”. The Snapchat was then brought up at a Young Fine Gael hustings event that Mr Hutchinson attended, where Ms MacNeill stated she had spoken with the candidate about her concerns.

A few days later Mr Hutchinson contacted Ms Carroll MacNeill and said he would withdraw from the election. Ms MacNeill said she thanked the candidate for the call and said he was “making the right decision”. She told Mr Hutchinson that she looked forward to working with him in the future.

She said: “At all times I was concerned for Kate, for Dylan and for the way in which the party communicates about political representatives generally.”

Ms O’Connell told *The Times* yesterday that she was not aware of the incident, but had received an “unsolicited” apology in June from Mr Hutchinson regarding the Snapchat post.

“I was aware, however, of some disparaging Snapchat posts being published by individuals within the [Young Fine Gael] organisation,” she said.

She added: “I’ve never seen the comment. I have yet to lose any sleep over it.”

After Mr Hutchinson withdrew from the election, Maurice Dockrell defeated Joe Lawlor on June 26 to fill the vacancy left by Mr Ward’s appointment as a senator. Mr Dockrell was then co-opted by the county council in July.

Fine Gael did not respond to requests for comment.

Ms Carroll MacNeill was elected in February’s general election, after being selected to replace Maria Bailey, following the [swing-gate controversy](#). She had served as a councillor since May last year.

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## ‘I miss my grandmother the most’: The immigrants in Ireland restricted from seeing family



Reabetswe Zwane has not been able to see her family in South Africa since December 2019  
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Saturday February 13 2021, 12.01am GMT, The Times

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**M**any people see travel restrictions as the final nail in the coffin for their summer holidays, but for thousands of non-nationals in Ireland it means missing out on time with elderly grandparents and parents abroad.

Vishwajeet Gain, 24, from Calcutta, India, moved to Ireland in September 2019 to undertake a masters in journalism after studying English literature and writing a dissertation on James Joyce's *The Dubliners*. He had originally planned to visit his family last summer, but soon Covid-19 became too much of a risk for him to consider travelling abroad.

“The main thing I miss the most is my grandmother, I really want to see her and every time I call she is asking me when I will come and visit. And I mean, when I left she wasn't doing the best so I really want to be able to see her soon,” Gain told *The Times*.



Vishwajeet Gain said it was neither affordable nor safe to travel to India  
SONJA TUTTY

Remaining hopeful, the goal was to organise a visit for Christmas but the cost of flights skyrocketed and cases began to climb again in Ireland.

“Aside from travel restriction or quarantining or cost, it just was not safe for me to travel. My parents are in their fifties and my grandmother is older so it just was not smart for me to go on three planes to get to them,” he said.

According to the Indian embassy in Dublin there are about 45,000 people of Indian origin living in Ireland with many working in IT, healthcare, engineering and senior management positions.

Walking past Kavanagh's pub, Gain said: "It was hard, I spent Christmas alone because my housemates weren't around and Christmas was also my sister's 16th birthday so I missed that and I missed my parent's 25th wedding anniversary."



Gianluca Tettamanti said it was selfish for people to travel abroad during the pandemic

Gianluca Tettamanti, 35, from northern Italy but living close to Stoneybatter in Dublin, reminisced about Lake Como near his family in Lombardy.

“I miss the lake home and just being able to walk around the town and see friends. Of course the weather is better there,” he said.

According to the last census in 2016, the Central Statistics Office said there were 11,732 Italian nationals living in Ireland, a significant increase from 7,656 in 2011.

Tettamanti lives alone in an apartment near Phoenix Park and works as a graphic designer. He moved to Ireland in 2017 and said the last time he saw his parents, two older sisters and childhood friends was in January 2020 — just before the region became the epicentre for the first wave of Covid-19 in Europe.

“Our town was very bad with cases, so I was really concerned for my parents and family of course. It was all a rollercoaster of emotions for me being here when coronavirus came to Italy,” he said.

He added that hearing about people who had gone on foreign holidays during the pandemic was frustrating after he spent Christmas without family for the first time in his life.



“I think it is selfish and self-centred. And I have been compliant for the whole time with restrictions so it is hard to hear and it makes me angry to hear these stories,” he said.

He said that since there was a risk that travel restrictions would be extended throughout the summer, he has pushed back plans to visit family until September. “My parents are in their seventies so I can’t risk it at the moment, but hopefully they said they will get the vaccine in May so then I can start thinking,” he said.

“Family for me is the most important thing, it’s what I miss the most and what I think about the most. It’s been hard and a bit depressing to be honest. I live alone and it can be quite isolating.”

Reabetswe Zwane, 27, has not been able to see her family in South Africa since December 2019. She and her husband did not have plans to visit home in 2020 or 2021, but would have relocated to Johannesburg to be with their family throughout the lockdown if restrictions had allowed.

Zwane said the conditions in South Africa had worsened in terms of rising cases, the new variant and high unemployment rates.

“My mom had her salary cut and my in-laws are self-employed so they have not gotten any work. So one thing that’s been really different for us was we had to start financially supporting them,” she said. “We may not have had plans to travel, but the start of the pandemic we just wanted to be with our families so we have been very homesick.”

She said the main thing she missed about South Africa was the sunshine and people but added that she was grateful for Ireland’s “community-centred” society. “I miss African people — if I can say it that way — but Ireland has been good. Many

people have lost their families during the pandemic, so we are doing okay.”

She added: “But Christmas was hard. My husband and I were able to have another South African friend over but making a meal for three people, and the table was so small — it was strange. The house felt empty because we would usually have holidays not with just our immediate family but the whole extended family.”

The last census showed that there were 3,208 South African immigrants and descendants living in Ireland.

Zwane said it was unlikely they would be able to travel to South Africa this year as her home country struggles to contain the new variant and restrictions were not “as strict as they should be”.

“But hopefully we can see them all in 2022,” she said.

Non-essential foreign travel is banned under the current restrictions, with fines of €500. The fines are due to be increased to €2,000 this month.

Last month 110,930 passengers travelled through Dublin airport with roughly 60 per cent of the trips declared as non-essential. Just over 39 per cent of passengers who completed a passenger locator form declared an essential purpose for travel. More than 5,200 Irish residents that arrived into Dublin airport in the last week of January said they had been on holidays.

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