I refer to your request where you asked:

I am emailing to request copies of all records held – including any minutes, meeting reports, emails or letters – in relation to the following external meetings between Sir Jeremy Heywood and

1. The Daily Mail – April 2013
2. The Independent – May 2013
3. The Guardian (Alan Rusbridger) – June 2013
5. The Telegraph (Tony Gallagher) – October 2013

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that the information you requested is held by the Cabinet Office.

The Information you have requested is exempt under section 35(1)(a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act, which protects the formulation of policy and communications between Ministers. Disclosure would weaken Ministers’ ability to discuss controversial and sensitive topics free from premature public scrutiny.

Section 35 is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours the release of this material. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. I recognise that the decisions Ministers take may have a significant impact on the lives of citizens and there is a public interest in their deliberations being transparent. These public interests have to be weighed against a strong public interest that policy-making and its implementation are of the highest quality and informed by a full consideration of all the options. Ministers must be able to receive advice from officials freely and frankly, exchange views on available options and understand their possible implications. The candour of all involved would be affected by their assessment of whether the content of the discussions will be disclosed prematurely. If discussions were routinely made public there is a risk that Ministers may feel inhibited from being frank and candid in discussions. As a result the quality of debate underlying collective decision making would decline, leading to worse informed and poorer decision making. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.
In addition some of the information you have requested is exempt under section 23(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, which exempts information held by a public authority from disclosure if it was provided to that the public authority by the Security and Intelligence agencies, or if that information relates to the Security and Intelligence agencies. Section 23 is an absolute exemption and the Cabinet Office is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact the FOI team. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Roger Smethurst
Head of Knowledge and Information Management
Cabinet Office
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

email: foi.team@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner’s Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

FOI Team
Cabinet Office